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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.

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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



Saturday, Jan. 25

HOSA Winter Formal, GHS Gym

Girls C Invitational, 10 a.m. Groton Arena

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.

Hughes Fire Halted

Firefighters made progress on the fast-spreading Hughes Fire in northwest Los Angeles County yesterday despite continued strong gusts in the area. Growth in the fire near Castaic Lake was halted after the blaze scorched over 10,000 acres in less than 24 hours Wednesday. Its rapid pace had prompted evacuation orders or warnings for over 50,000 residents near Santa Clarita, though most had returned to their homes by yesterday. It was 36% contained as of this writing.

The Hughes Fire's quick spread made it the third-largest fire in the region after the twin Palisades and Eaton fires claimed 28 lives and burned more than 40,000 acres earlier this month. Impacted communities of those fires, which include dozens of celebrities, have begun the process of rebuilding, with the costs of the fires estimated to be \$50B, including an estimated \$350M in LA infrastructure.

Ash blown from burn scars prompted air quality alerts in much of the region. Several smaller fires have erupted in the area, including the Sepulveda and Laguna fires, which have been halted by thousands of prepositioned first responders.

Oscar Nods Revealed

Nominations for the 97th Academy Awards were announced yesterday, led by Jacques Audiard's "Emilia Pérez," with a record-breaking 13 nominations for a non-English-language film. The Spanish-language musical about a transgender drug lord in Mexico received nods for best picture, best director, and acting categories. "The Brutalist" and "Wicked" followed with 10 nominations each, and "A Complete Unknown" and "Conclave" with eight nominations each.

Karla Sofía Gascón makes history as the first openly transgender actress nominated in an acting category for her role in "Emilia Pérez." Adrien Brody received a nomination for best actor for his portrayal of a Holocaust survivor who emigrates to America post-World War II in Brady Corbet's epic "The Brutalist."

The nominations were announced after being delayed twice due to the wildfires that affected Southern California. The 97th Academy Awards ceremony is scheduled for March 2 and will be hosted by Conan O'Brien.

Assassination Files Released

The remaining classified files related to the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy will be made public in the near future, following an executive order from President Donald Trump yesterday. Government documents pertaining to the 1968 assassinations of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy and Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. will also be reviewed for eventual release.

Congress mandated in 1992 that files related to the killing of the country's 35th president be declassified by 2017. That deadline was missed, and files—many with numerous redactions—have been released in batches over the past seven years. Officials have said 97% of more than 5 million documents related to JFK's assassination have been made available to date.

The assassination has spurred numerous conspiracy theories over the decades, in part because the motives of the shooter, Lee Harvey Oswald, were never publicly determined. Separately, Robert F. Kennedy Jr.—Trump's nominee for health secretary—has suggested the CIA may have played a role in the deaths of his uncle and father.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

NFL playoffs continue Sunday with the Philadelphia Eagles taking on the Washington Commanders in the NFC Championship (3 pm ET, Fox) and the Kansas City Chiefs and Buffalo Bills in the AFC Championship (6:30 pm ET, CBS).

Grammy-winning singer SZA to join Kendrick Lamar at the Super Bowl halftime show.

Song recorded for Tina Turner's iconic "Private Dancer" album, which was previously presumed lost, is rediscovered and will be released on the 40th anniversary edition of the album.

American Madison Keys upsets No. 2 seed Iga Swiatek to advance to her first Australian Open final; No. 19 seed Keys will take on No. 1 seed Aryna Sabalenka in the final.

Science & Technology

Carmaker Subaru fixes software bug that allowed hackers to unlock and start millions of vehicles via the company's internet network; security flaw also exposed a year's worth of location history.

Study reveals how mushroom coral—a free-standing type of coral, not attached to rocks—actively moves toward light; discovery reveals previously unknown mechanics of the organism.

Personalized mini-organs allow researchers to more rapidly test and develop drugs for rare diseases; specimens are grown from patients' blood cells into functional tissue.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +0.5%, Dow +0.9%, Nasdaq +0.2%); S&P 500 nabs new record as President Donald Trump calls for lower interest rates and oil prices in Davos remarks.

Nikola shares close down nearly 28% on report of EV maker's potential sale.

Purdue Pharma and Sackler family, behind the maker of OxyContin, reach \$7.4B settlement with 15 states over opioid crisis.

UnitedHealthcare names company veteran Tim Noel as CEO after fatal shooting of Brian Thompson.

CNN lays off around 6% of its workforce, or about 200 jobs, as it shifts to digital and prepares to launch a streaming service.

Adidas plans to cut up to 500 jobs at its German headquarters,

Politics & World Affairs

Pete Hegseth's bid for defense secretary heads to full Senate vote today.

CIA Director John Ratcliffe confirmed by Senate.

Judge temporarily halts executive order to end birthright citizenship.

Italy's top court upholds Amanda Knox's slander conviction for falsely accusing innocent man of murdering her roommate in 2007.

UK teen sentenced to 52 years in prison for fatally stabbing three girls at a dance class last year.

Thailand begins recognizing same-sex marriages, becoming third place in Asia to do so after Taiwan and Nepal.



FTC Sues Deere & Co. Over Right to Repair

Iowa and other state Farmers Unions celebrate the action

The Federal Trade Commission and attorneys general from Minnesota and Illinois are suing Deere & Co. claiming it engages in "unfair practices" relating to equipment repairs.

The recent move by the FTC follows years of advocacy and a formal complaint from National Farmers Union and locals in key agricultural states, including Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin.

Iowa Farmers Union President Aaron Lehman called the company a monopoly and said it was taking the tools out of farmers' hands.

"Farmers are innovative and hard-working, and they should have the right to repair their own equipment," Lehman said in a statement.

A press release from FTC about the complaint said the company's "unfair" practices have "boosted Deere's multi-billion-dollar profits" while "burdening farmers with higher repair costs."

According to the filing, the company has made increasingly sophisticated equipment that requires electronic diagnostic and repair tools, of which Deere has a monopoly.

The complaint alleges Deere makes this technology available only to licensed John Deere dealers, which limits the ability of farmers and independent repair providers to repair equipment themselves. This, according to the complaint, costs farmers valuable time and money when their equipment breaks down.

National Farmers Union President Rob Larew called the lawsuit a "key victory in this fight for family farmers and ranchers" and said "monopolies should not stop farmers from being able to repair their own equipment."

"When we prevail, farmers will have the power and freedom to fix their equipment faster and at a lower cost," Larew said in a statement. "We commend the FTC on this decisive step to safeguard farmers' rights."

Deere & Company said in a statement the FTC's complaint was based on "flagrant misrepresentations of the facts" and "fatally flawed legal theories."

The company, which started in Iowa and is now based in Illinois, said it has a "longstanding commitment" to customer repair, including a recent announcement that allows customers to reprogram electronic controllers on Deere-manufactured equipment.

Denver Caldwell, the company's vice president of aftermarket and customer support, said the company is dedicated to "enhancing" its customers' abilities to repair equipment, even as it becomes more technologically advanced.

"We are committed to offering customers the best equipment ownership experience, both in the form of world-class dealer support and extensive self-repair resources," Caldwell said in the statement. "This offering advances our goal of minimizing customers' unplanned downtime and enables them to be more productive and profitable in their operations."

The Deere & Company response to the FTC complaint pointed to a dissenting statement from Andrew Ferguson, who was then a commissioner, now chair of the FTC since the recent change in administration.

Ferguson, who was joined by commissioner Melissa Holyoak on the statement, said his colleagues' complaint, which was filed Jan. 15, had a "stench of partisan motivation" and "shortchanges an ongoing investigation."

Ferguson said the commission has worked to understand the complex repair market, but does not have the evidence to expect success on such a complaint. He said it should instead focus on a short order to provide relief to farmers.

The FTC complaint asks for the courts to order Deere & Company make their repair technology tools available to farmers and independent repair providers and to prohibit Deere from engaging in "unfair and anticompetitive" practices.

The complaint is set to have a motion hearing at 1:30 p.m. Friday in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois in Rockford, Illinois.

Cami Koons is an Iowa Capital Dispatch reporter covering agriculture and the environment. She previously worked at publications in Kansas and Missouri, covering rural affairs.

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Tigers Pull Away from Bulldogs in Key Basketball Matchup

The Groton Area Tigers continued their strong season with a commanding 58-43 victory over the Milbank Bulldogs in boys basketball action. The win improves the Tigers to 7-4 on the season, while the Bulldogs fall to 3-6.

Groton set the tone early, storming out to an 8-0 lead before holding a 17-9 advantage after the first quarter. However, Milbank responded with determination in the second quarter, scoring the first seven points to tie the game at 17. After briefly tying the game again at 18, the Tigers found their rhythm, launching an 18-3 run that spanned the second and third quarters. This decisive stretch pushed Groton's lead to 41-23, leaving Milbank struggling to close the gap.

The Tigers led 30-20 at halftime and 41-25 after three quarters. Milbank mounted a spirited fourth-quarter rally, cutting the deficit to 10 points at 48-38. But Groton regained control, closing the game on a strong run to secure the 58-43 victory.

Ryder Johnson led the way for the Tigers with a game-high 19 points, showcasing his scoring ability both inside and out. Gage Sippel added 13 points, while Keegen Tracy contributed 10. Becker Bosma chipped in nine points, Carson Zac had six, and Jayden Schwan rounded out the scoring with one point.

Defensively, Groton was active, with Johnson and Bosma collecting three steals apiece as part of the teams nine steals. The Tigers also tallied seven blocks, including two each from Johnson, Bosma, and Zach. Groton shot efficiently, hitting 45% of their field goals (14-for-31), 40% of their three-pointers (6-for-15), and 75% of their free throws (12-for-16).

Milbank's offense was led by Lincoln Holscher, who scored 12 points, seven of which came in the fourth quarter during the Bulldogs' late push. Brian Meyer added 10 points, with Sam Rick scoring eight, Graham Lightfield seven, Ryan Keaton three, Emmett Hansen two, and Jack Howard one.

The Bulldogs struggled with their shooting, finishing 33% from the field (15-for-46) and 29% from beyond the arc (7-for-24). However, they matched Groton's free-throw efficiency, hitting 75% (6-for-8). Milbank won the rebounding battle, pulling down 32 boards compared to Groton's 24.

While both teams were evenly matched in turnovers Groton had 10 to Milbank's 12.

The Tigers will look to keep their momentum going as they move deeper into the season, while the Bulldogs aim to regroup and bounce back in their next contest.

- Story compiled by ChatGPT

Ryder Johnson: 19 points, 7 rebounds, 2 assists, 3 steals, 2 blocks

Gage Sippel: 13 points, 8 rebounds, 1 steal, 2 fouls, 1 block.

Keegen Tracy: 10 points, 2 rebounds, 4 assists, 2 steals, 2 fouls.

Becker Bosma: 9 points, 4 rebounds, 4 assists, 2 steals, 2 fouls, 2 blocks.

Karson Zak: 6 points, 1 rebound, 2 assists, 2 blocks.

Jayden Schwan: 1 point, 1 rebound, 1 foul.

Blake Pauli: 1 rebound, 1 foul.

Turner Thompson: 1 assist.

Totals: 2-pointers: 14-31 45%, 3-pointers: 6-15 40%, Free Throws: 12-16 75 percent, 24 rebounds, 10 turnovers, 13 assists, 9 steals, 9 fouls, 7 blocks.

Milbank: Lincoln Holscher 12, Bryan Meyer 10, Sam Rick 8, Graham Lightfield 7, Ryan Keaton 3, Emmett Hanson 2, Jack Howard 1. 2-Pointers: 15-46 33%, 3-Pointers: 7-24 29%, Free Throws: 8-10 80%, 16 fouls, 9 assists, 12 turnovers, 2 blocks, 7 steals.

Groton won the junior varsity game, 40-36. Asher Johnson 10, Ryder Schelle 9, Jayden Schwan 5, Jace Johnson 5, Ethan Kroll 3, Jordan Schwan 2, Anthony Tracy 1, Teylor Diegel 1. Milbank: Jeter Scoular 12, Ryan Keaton 7, Layten Osowski 7, Lincoln Holscher 7, Braylen Bowsher 4, Esteban Abrego 3.

Lady Tigers Edge Bulldogs in Hard-Fought Victory

The Groton Area Lady Tigers improved to 9-3 on the season after a hard-fought 42-34 victory over the Milbank Bulldogs, who dropped to 7-4. The game showcased strong defensive efforts from both teams and key offensive performances that made the difference.

Milbank opened the scoring and battled through a back-and-forth first quarter, with two lead changes before Groton settled into an 8-5 advantage. The second quarter was a nail-biter, with the game tied four times before heading into halftime deadlocked at 16.

The third quarter proved pivotal. Groton capitalized on their shooting opportunities, hitting 4 of 11 shots (36%) compared to Milbank's cold 2 of 11 performance (17%). The Lady Tigers took a 26-21 lead into the final frame.

Milbank continued to struggle offensively in the fourth quarter, connecting on just 2 of 9 field goal attempts. Groton maintained their composure, shooting 5 of 10 in the final period to secure the 42-34 win.

Stat Breakdown:

* Groton Area: The Tigers shot 37% from the field, making 15 of 41 attempts. They dominated the boards with 39 rebounds, including 14 offensive boards, and shared the ball well with 10 assists. However, turnovers were an issue, with 24 on the night.

* Milbank: The Bulldogs struggled offensively, shooting just 26% (10 of 39). Despite the tough night, they were able to capitalize on free throws, making 10 of 18 for 56%.

Key Players:

* Groton Area:

* Rylee Dunker: A standout performance with a double-double, scoring 12 points and grabbing 12 rebounds. She also added 3 steals.

* Taryn Traphagen: Contributed 9 points and 5 rebounds.

* Faith Traphagen: Stepped up with 10 points.

* Kennedy Hansen: Added 6 points.

* Jerrica Locke: Dished out 3 assists, recorded 1 block, and scored 1 point.

* Layla Roberts and Chesney Weber: Combined for 4 points.

* Milbank:

* Isabella Anderson: Led the Bulldogs with 13 points, which included four of six free throws and a clutch three-pointer in the fourth quarter.

* Tyra Berry: Added 11 points in a solid offensive showing.

* Anna Neugebauer: Contributed 7 points and was a force on the boards with 6 rebounds.

Milbank had solid contributions from their key players, particularly Anderson, who stepped up in the fourth quarter. However, their shooting struggles throughout the game made it difficult to keep pace with Groton.

The win reflects Groton's resilience and ability to execute under pressure, solidifying their strong start to the season. Meanwhile, Milbank will look to regroup as they continue their competitive campaign.

- Story compiled by ChatGPT

Groton Area:

Rylee Dunker: 12 points, 12 rebounds, 3 steals, 2 fols.

Faith Traphagen: 10 points, 4 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 steal, 2 fouls.

Taryn Traphagen: 9 points, 5 rebounds, 2 assists, 3 fouls.

Kennedy Hansen: 6 points, 2 rebounds, 4 fouls.

Chesney Weber: 3 points, 9 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 steal, 1 foul.

Jerica Locke: 1 point, 2 rebounds, 3 assists, 2 fouls, 1 block.

Laila Roberts: 1 point, 2 rebounds, 2 assists, 1 steal, 3 fouls.

Jayedyn Penning: 2 rebounds, 1 steal, 2 fouls.

Brooklyn Hansen: 1 rebound.

2-Pointers: 10-27 37%, 3-Pointers: 5-15 33%, Free Throws: 7-18 39%, 39 rebounds, 24 turnovers, 10

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assists, 7 steals, 19 fouls, 1 block.

Milbank: Isabella Anderson 13, Tyra Berry 11, Anna Neugebauer 7, Siera Wenzl 2, Avery Schuneman 1.
Field Goals: 10-39 26%, Free Thwos: 10-18 56%, 26 rebounds, 20 fouls, 6 assists, 17 turnovers, 1 block, 14 steals.

Milbank led at the quarterstops at 15-7, 26-14 and 36-22 en route to a 51-31 win in the junior varsity game:
Groton Scoring: Kella Tracy 9, Talli Wright 5, Mia Crank 4, Sydney Locke 3, Ashlynn Warrington 3, Chesney Weber 3, McKenna Tietz 2, Makenna Krause 2.

Milbank: Anna Neugebauer 13, Avery Schuneman 10, Belle Pauli 10, Susie Schuneman 6, Adison Pauli 5, Bree Townsend 4, Zayda Townsend 3.

Groton Area won the C game, 33-32. Groton led after the first quarter, 15-10, and led 24-22 at halftime. Milbank took a 28-26 lead in the third quarter and led going into the fourth quarter, 32-28. Milbank went scoreless in the fourth quarter as Sydney Locke and Addison Hoffman each made a basket to lift the Tigers to the win.

Groton Area: Ashlynn Warrington 7, Sydney Locke 5, Addison Hoffman 4, Emerlee Jones 4, Teagan Hanten 3, Kinsley Rowen 2, Makenna Kruse 2, Brenna Imrie 1, Avery Crank 1.

Milbank: Bailee Hendricks 11, Violet Johnson 6, Ella Koplín 5, Kylynn Schwandt 2, Keira Untalan 2, Lauren Lester 2, Avigail Howard 2.

All five games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM. The varsity games were sponsored by Agtegra, Avantara Groton, Bierman Farm Service, BK Custom T's & More, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Ferney Farmers Union, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, Groton Subway, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Lanes & Lounge, Locke Electric, Krueger Brothers, R&M Farms/Rix Farms and The Meathouse in Andover. Larry and Val Flieds sponsored the girls C game and Dave and Tammy Dohman sponsored both of the junior varsity games. Shane Clark was on hand for play-by-play. Jeslyn Kosel ran the camera and Paul Kosel was in charge of technology.



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

Name Released in Bon Homme County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: South Dakota Highway 50, mile marker 364, three miles west of Tabor, SD

When: 1:52 a.m., Sunday, January 19, 2025

Driver 1: Dustin John Joseph Cuka, 29-year-old male from Tyndall, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2012 Ford Escape

Seat belt Used: No

Bon Homme County, S.D.- One person died in a single vehicle crash that occurred early Sunday morning three miles west of Tabor, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Dustin John Joseph Cuka, the driver of a 2012 Ford Escape, was traveling westbound on SD Highway 50 near mile marker 364 when for an unknown reason, the vehicle left the roadway and entered the south ditch. The vehicle rolled, ejecting the driver.

Cuka was airlifted to a Sioux Falls hospital where he later passed away from his injuries.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

Northern State University Alumni, including Kristen Gonsoir, Recognized for Teaching Excellence

ABERDEEN, S.D. – Three graduates of the Millicent Atkins School of Education at Northern State University recently received national recognition for their outstanding contributions to education and their ability to make a difference in students' lives.

This recognition reflects Northern's legacy of preparing exceptional educators, a tradition that has led to the university being named the #1 education program in South Dakota for the past two years.

Allison Schmitz and Kristen Gonsoir were honored with the 2023 Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching. This prestigious award highlights their dedication to advancing STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education in their classrooms.

Schmitz, a math teacher in the Northwestern Area School District, has spent the past nine years teaching middle and high school students. Her courses range from sixth-grade math to Algebra II.

"Being nominated for the award was a great honor," Schmitz said. "The application process was rigorous and taught me a lot about myself and my teaching. Being selected as a state finalist and finally a national awardee has shown me that my hard work is noticed and appreciated."

She plans to continue her work as a mathematics educator, advocating for the field and inspiring students. "Right now, I plan on continuing what I have been doing," Schmitz said. "I will teach, I will learn, and I will advocate for mathematics educators and mathematics education."

Gonsoir, who has taught at Groton Area High School for 33 years, specializes in anatomy and physiology, organic chemistry, general chemistry, and physics. She is also passionate about incorporating global learning into her classroom, stemming from her participation in the 2022 Global Learning Fellowship program.

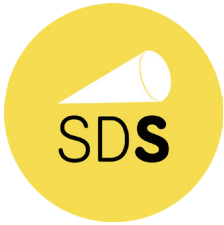
"I am honored to be recognized," Gonsoir said. "Knowing all the amazing things fellow state finalists are doing in their classrooms, I am very surprised to receive this award."

Gonsoir credits her master's degree in Teaching and Learning from Northern State University for helping her reflect on and refine her teaching practices. "Many of the pedagogies I was using in my classroom were soundly supported in research," she said. "The students in my classroom are constantly changing, and what they bring to the classroom changes, therefore how I teach must change."

The Presidential Award recognizes teachers for exemplary mentoring sustained over a minimum of five years. Schmitz and Gonsoir are among thousands of educators nationwide who have received this recognition. Each honoree is awarded \$10,000 from the National Science Foundation, along with a certificate signed by the president and an invitation to a celebration in Washington, D.C.

In addition, Kristyanna Brandriet, principal of James Knoll Elementary School in the Ortonville School District, received the 2024 Terrel H. Bell Award for Outstanding School Leadership. She was one of only nine principals in the country to earn this recognition. Brandriet's school was also awarded the National Blue Ribbon Schools Award from the U.S. Department of Education in September 2024, solidifying its reputation for educational excellence.

Northern State University is proud to celebrate the remarkable achievements of these alumni, whose dedication and leadership exemplify the university's commitment to fostering outstanding educators who make a lasting impact in their communities.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Bill requiring SD public schools to display and teach Ten Commandments passes committee

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 23, 2025 2:54 PM

A committee of South Dakota lawmakers voted 4-3 to endorse a bill Thursday in Pierre that would require public school districts to teach the Ten Commandments and display them in every classroom.

The vote came after an hour of testimony that included opposition from public school groups. The legislation now heads to the full state Senate.

The bill would mandate 8-by-14-inch posters with "easily readable font." It would repeal existing language in state law allowing local school boards to choose to display the Ten Commandments.

The bill would also require the Ten Commandments to be taught as part of history and civics classes three times during a student's education — at least once during each of the elementary, middle and high school years. Additional provisions in the bill would require instruction on the state and federal constitutions, the federal Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of Independence.

The bill would require the Ten Commandments to be presented "as a historical legal document, including the influence of the Ten Commandments on the legal, ethical, and other cultural traditions of Western civilization."

A freshman lawmaker, Sen. John Carley, R-Piedmont, introduced the bill. He said early American textbooks, like the New England Primer and McGuffey Readers, featured the Ten Commandments.

"I don't think that there's a singular document, perhaps outside the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, that has been more ubiquitous in law, in government and education and media and culture, than the Ten Commandments," Carley said.

Elijah O'Neal from the American Journey Experience Museum in Texas also spoke in favor of the bill. The museum's website says it covers topics including "Biblical Worldview" and "Christianity's Influence in America." He said the Ten Commandments provide timeless moral guidance.

O'Neal also spoke on behalf of WallBuilders, a Texas-based organization supporting similar legislation in North Dakota. The organization says it helps Americans "celebrate and safeguard the authentic history of our nation."

Earlier this year, Louisiana became the first state to enact a law requiring the Ten Commandments to be displayed in all classrooms. The Louisiana law is being challenged in court by parents who allege that it violates the First Amendment's prohibition against state-sponsored religion. Similar legislation failed in Texas in 2023, but supporters plan to try again this year.

Legality debated

Opponent testimony came from the South Dakota School Administrators Association, the South Dakota Association of School Boards, the South Dakota United Schools Association, the South Dakota Large School Group, American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota, and some local religious leaders.

Opponents said the bill violates the state and federal constitutions. The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution prohibits laws "respecting an establishment of religion." South Dakota's constitution says "No person shall be compelled to attend or support any ministry or place of worship against his consent nor shall any preference be given by law to any religious establishment or mode of worship." It goes on to say that "No money or property of the state shall be given or appropriated for the benefit of any sectarian or religious society or institution."

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The Rev. Lauren Stanley, an Episcopal priest, said the bill violates the separation of church and state. "Teaching the Ten Commandments as a basis for our laws, which is what this bill calls for, is clearly a violation of the right to religious freedom," she said.

Bill supporter and Texas attorney Matt Krause said a 2022 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*, concluded that public displays of religious symbols "rooted in history and tradition" are constitutionally permissible. In that case, the court ruled that a high school football coach's on-field prayers were protected under the First Amendment.

Krause is a Republican former Texas state representative who has been advocating for Ten Commandments legislation around the nation for the First Liberty Institute.

Rob Monson, representing South Dakota school administrators, said the bill removes local decision-making and imposes a one-size-fits-all mandate.

"If we believe putting the Ten Commandments on every classroom wall is going to have some sort of moral bearing on students, I think we're horribly mistaken," he said.

Opponents warned the law could provoke lawsuits, risking taxpayer expense. They also questioned how controversial or adult themes in the Ten Commandments, such as adultery, would be explained to young students.

Lawmakers split

Sen. Jamie Smith, D-Sioux Falls, voted against the bill. He is a former public school teacher and the lone Democrat on the Senate Education Committee.

Smith said there are different versions of the Ten Commandments, and he did not grow up with the version Carley wants displayed.

"There's a lot of people in this room that have talked about indoctrination, especially towards me, because of the party that I'm a member of," he said. "I've heard it over and over about the indoctrination of the left. And you're going to stand here today and tell me we're not trying to do something in the other direction right now?"

The committee chairman, Sen. Kyle Schoenfish, R-Scotland, also voted against the measure. He said a statewide mandate is not necessary when current law already allows schools to choose to display the Ten Commandments.

Sen. Sue Peterson, R-Sioux Falls, said a similar state law requiring the display of the national motto, "In God We Trust," in public schools has been implemented without significant problems since the law was adopted in 2019. She said the new bill could follow a similar path.

The South Dakota Board of Education Standards would oversee compliance with the bill. The legislation includes no punishment for noncompliance.

Voting yes on the bill were Sens. Peterson; Sam Marty, R-Prairie City; Stephanie Sauder, R-Bryant; and Curt Voight, R-Rapid City. Voting no were Sens. Smith, Schoenfish and Lauren Nelson, R-Yankton.

Ten Commandments language

Sen. John Carley's bill to require posting and teaching the Ten Commandments includes this version of the document:

- (1) I AM the LORD your God, thou shalt have no other gods before me;
- (2) Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image;
- (3) Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain;
- (4) Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy;
- (5) Honor thy father and mother;
- (6) Thou shalt not murder;
- (7) Thou shalt not commit adultery;
- (8) Thou shalt not steal;
- (9) Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor; and

(10) Thou shalt not covet.

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.

Carbon pipeline company asks court to force SD regulator's recusal due to alleged conflict

Utilities commissioner's relatives own land along proposed route

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 23, 2025 4:48 PM

A company hoping to build a carbon dioxide pipeline wants a court to disqualify a South Dakota regulator from considering the project's permit application, due to an alleged conflict of interest.

Iowa-based Summit Carbon Solutions filed a legal action Thursday in Hughes County court. The company wants an order forcing Public Utilities Commissioner Kristie Fiegen to recuse herself, or an order requiring her to appear and explain why the court shouldn't impose such an order.

Summit said Fiegen has family connections to land that would be crossed by the pipeline. That land is in McCook County and is owned by a trust that includes Fiegen's sister-in-law, Jean Fiegen-Ordal, as a trustee.

Summit said it has paid Fiegen-Ordal and her husband a total of \$88,755 for an easement and for potential damages caused by the project. An easement is an agreement granting access to land.

Summit said in a press release that Fiegen's family ties create "an unavoidable conflict of interest."

The company is proposing a \$9 billion, five-state pipeline to capture some of the carbon dioxide emitted by 57 ethanol plants and transport it for underground storage in North Dakota. The project has received permits in Iowa, Minnesota and North Dakota, while Nebraska does not have a permitting process.

The South Dakota Public Utilities Commission rejected Summit's first application in 2023. Fiegen recused herself from considering that application, due to the same sister-in-law's ownership of land on the proposed pipeline route.

"A Public Utilities Commissioner may not participate in a proceeding in which the Commissioner has a conflict of interest," Fiegen wrote in a letter at the time. "Given this familial relationship, I am regretfully disqualifying myself from participation in this proceeding."

Since Summit reapplied last year, Fiegen has refused to recuse herself, saying in a letter to Summit, "I do not have a legal conflict. I am sitting on the docket."

The letter did not put Summit at ease.

"Commissioner Fiegen's letter refusing to disqualify herself," Summit's legal action says, "offers no explanation why the fact of her close family members' ownership of land crossed by the proposed pipeline does not constitute a conflict of interest."

Summit also said Fiegen's involvement could open the door to appeals and litigation, potentially delaying the permitting process.

South Dakota law leaves conflicts of interests for public utilities commissioners undefined. It says "if a commissioner determines" that the commissioner has a conflict, the commissioner should file a recusal letter.

Fiegen has refused to comment publicly on the matter beyond her official letters. Public Utilities Commission spokesperson Leah Mohr has said "ex parte" rules bar Fiegen from discussing the matter. Those rules prohibit direct communication with commissioners about dockets they're considering.

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.

Prison medical staff shortage worsens as security shortage eases

South Dakota corrections secretary explains problem and solutions to lawmakers

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JANUARY 23, 2025 3:59 PM

PIERRE — The South Dakota Department of Corrections is searching to fill 63 vacant medical staff positions, department officials told lawmakers Thursday at the Capitol. That's a vacancy rate of 53% among licensed practice nurses and 40% among registered nurses.

Both rates are greater than the 27% average among security staff in 2022, which garnered headlines at the time. Three years later, the prison system's security staff vacancy rate averages 10%, department Secretary Kellie Wasko said. She attributes the stabilization to wage raises and policy changes.

Part of the department's nursing shortage is due to nurses feeling unsafe at work, Wasko told lawmakers. It's also becoming more difficult to compete with the private sector, since there is a nationwide nursing shortage.

Prison clinical staff are responsible for providing inmate medical care, which includes medical assessments and providing medications. Wasko, who started in the corrections industry as a registered nurse, said she did sutures, treated stab wounds, changed dressings and did post-operative care in her decade of prison nursing experience.

"No one wants to go somewhere they don't feel safe," Wasko said. "And this goes for the correctional staff as well. Nobody wants to be verbally demeaned or have feces and urine thrown on them. Our current environment creates that."

Wasko said the unsafe environment is due largely to the antiquated nature of the penitentiary in Sioux Falls, one of the state's eight prison facilities. Parts of the penitentiary date back to 1881.

She also updated lawmakers on plans to replace the penitentiary with a new prison 15 miles south of Sioux Falls. She told lawmakers the new Lincoln County men's prison is needed to replace the penitentiary, ensure safe working environments and better provide programming for inmates.

Wasko pulled back on benefits when she first started with the department due to "fiscal responsibility" concerns.

"I think I made the wrong decision in pulling those back from staff," Wasko said.

The department is working to reimplement those benefits and make other changes to improve conditions for medical staff within the prison system. The department offers a loan repayment and scholarship program and \$10,000 sign-on bonus for prison nurses. It also offers a \$5 wage increase for overnight nursing shifts.

A registered nurse salary in the department ranges from \$28 to \$40 an hour, depending on experience and the security level within the prison, according to department job postings.

To fill vacant positions, the department has contracted travel nurses. Anticipated travel nurse expenses for this fiscal year, which runs through June, stand at \$4.6 million, said department Finance Director Brittni Skipper. That's a 48% increase from \$3.1 million spent in fiscal year 2024.

The state Department of Health managed prison clinical services and staffing before the Department of Corrections took it over in fiscal year 2024.

The department is requesting a clinical services budget, which includes care inside prison facilities and specialized care at typical health care facilities, of \$38.2 million for fiscal year 2026 — an increase of \$954,731. Wasko said that increase is driven by anticipated prison populations.

Inmates visited system health care clinics an average of 6,283 times a month in fiscal year 2024, according to the department's statistical report.

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.

Trump pick for USDA secretary says she has 'a lot to learn' about bird flu

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JANUARY 23, 2025 4:55 PM

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's pick to lead the U.S. Department of Agriculture said during her confirmation hearing Thursday that she has "a lot to learn" about highly pathogenic avian influenza or bird flu, the virus that's wreaking havoc on the country's poultry industry and dairy farms.

The outbreak has affected more than 136 million poultry flocks and nearly 1,000 dairy herds, and infected 67 humans, with one person dying so far. Public health experts continue to assess the risk of infection to the general public as low, but are closely monitoring bird flu's spread among farm workers and livestock as well as domestic cats and other mammals.

The four-hour hearing showed Brooke Rollins likely has the support to secure Senate confirmation, though members from both political parties raised concerns about the decline in family farms, hollowing out of rural America, speed with which USDA delivers disaster aid to farmers and future of nutrition programs.

Tariffs and trade

Rollins also received numerous questions from both Democrats and Republicans about Trump's plan to raise tariffs on imports, likely leading to retaliatory tariffs on American exports and negative repercussions for farmers and food prices.

"Regarding the president's tariff agenda, I think it probably comes as no surprise to anyone sitting in this room that he believes it is a very important tool in his toolkit to continue or bring America back to the forefront of the world and to ensure that we have a thriving economy," Rollins said. "But just as he did and we did in the first administration, he also understands the potential devastating impact to our farmers and our ranchers."

Michigan Democratic Sen. Elissa Slotkin raised concerns about what happened during Trump's first administration after he placed tariffs on allied nations as well as China. She urged Rollins to make sure Trump understands that would likely happen again, if he does place steep tariffs on other countries.

"President Trump announced 25% tariffs on Chinese products — batteries, TVs, medical devices," Slotkin said. "China retaliated and put 25% tariffs on soybeans, fruits, pork and some other items. Then we got into a trade war; we started adding more things to the list, they already started adding more things to the list. It went on and on and on and back and forth."

"Suddenly our farmers across the country are screaming bloody murder, because ... no one wanted to buy our stuff because it had a 25% tariff. We felt that very acutely."

The prior Trump administration then pulled billions out of the Commodity Credit Corporation to aid farmers who were harmed by the retaliatory tariffs, she said.

"That emergency fund is the same fund that helps us with things like avian flu that we're now dealing with all over the country," Slotkin said.

Kentucky Republican Sen. Mitch McConnell said he hoped the country won't go down the same path it has before with respect to tariffs and trade wars.

"It seems to me that trade has sort of become a word for a lot of Americans that implies exportation of jobs," McConnell said. "In Kentucky, we think of trade as exportation of products and it's an extremely important part of what we do."

Colorado Democratic Sen. Michael Bennet told Rollins that he is "sympathetic to some of the trade policies that President Trump is trying to advocate for."

"But agriculture's already in a tough spot ... and we don't want it to be in a tougher spot as a result of what happens here," Bennet said.

He then asked Rollins if she believed her responsibility as secretary of agriculture would be "to go into the Oval Office and say, 'You haven't thought through the unintended consequences that are going to flow to American agriculture if you pursue these trade policies.'"

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Rollins said her role, if confirmed, would be "to defend, to honor, to elevate our entire agriculture community in the Oval Office, around the table, through the interagency process. And to ensure that every decision that is made in the coming four years has that front of mind as those decisions are being made."

Bird flu

Rollins was less secure in telling senators how she should handle the ongoing bird flu, or H5N1, outbreak. Poultry farmers and the USDA have had to deal with the virus in domestic flocks for years, but it didn't begin infecting dairy herds until about a year ago.

The spillover into another section of American agriculture and the uptick in farmers catching the virus led to a multi-agency response from the federal government that included the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Food and Drug Administration and USDA.

"There is a lot that I have to learn on this. And if confirmed, this will be, as I mentioned in my opening statement, one of the very top priorities," Rollins said, referencing her previous comments about getting a "handle on the state of animal disease outbreaks."

Minnesota Democratic Sen. Amy Klobuchar, who had asked Rollins what her plan was for curbing the spread of bird flu, then questioned her about a new requirement that prevents some public health officials from external communications.

"I will note that just yesterday the administration announced they will halt external public health communications from the CDC on these avian flu (and) animal diseases," Klobuchar said. "These important announcements have helped keep producers up to date with the latest information on disease spread, health of workers. And while I know that wasn't under the USDA, I just urge you to talk to them about that. We're concerned."

Effect of mass deportations on ag

Rollins was pressed during the hearing about how sweeping deportations might impact the agriculture industry and food supplies throughout the country. Senators also asked how she planned to keep the pipeline that moves food from farms to people's tables from collapsing if mass deportations are carried out.

"President Trump ran and was overwhelmingly elected on the priority of border security and mass deportation," Rollins said. "He and his team are, I'm assuming, currently putting in place the plans to begin that process. Of course, first with those who have committed criminal offenses once they have been here."

Rollins said she planned to work with Labor Secretary nominee Lori Chavez-DeRemer, if she is confirmed, on issues related to the agriculture workforce.

Rollins testified she wants to make changes to the H2A visa for temporary agricultural workers, though she didn't detail what those changes might entail.

California Democratic Sen. Adam Schiff asked Rollins whether a potential sudden drop-off in agricultural workers due to mass deportations might lead to higher food prices "in sharp contrast with what the president said he wanted to do."

Rollins said while that was a hypothetical, it was one that "we do need to be thinking through."

"And I think it's a very fair point," Rollins said. "The president has made food inflation and the cost of food one of his top priorities. I have worked alongside him. I have been part of his team for many years now. I believe in his vision and his commitment to America and to his promises. And in so doing, I believe that we will be able to find in our toolkit what we need to do to solve for any hypothetical issues that end up turning out to be real moving forward over the coming months and years."

Rollins was the director of the Domestic Policy Council during Trump's first administration before going on to become the president and chief executive officer of the America First Policy Institute think tank.

Trump announced Rollins as his pick for agriculture secretary in November, writing that she "has a practitioner's experience, along with deep Policy credentials in both Nonprofit and Government leadership at the State and National levels."

Rural development

During the hearing, Rollins also addressed the needs of rural communities, including housing, child care and food assistance, during a detailed exchange with Minnesota Democratic Sen. Tina Smith.

"I sometimes think that people forget that the rural development side of the USDA is really important," Smith said. "And I will be honest, I'm fearful that the work done there — those efforts not being well understood — could become the target for budget-cutting."

"I also know that American farmers and ranchers really trust the USDA on those issues. They don't want to see those programs farmed out to other agencies, where we all are worried that they would just get less attention."

Rollins said that if confirmed, she would be excited "to put forward a vision and build a program around revivifying, restoring and bringing back rural America."

Smith also asked about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, saying that nutrition programs, many of which are administered by USDA, are "foundational for healthy Americans."

"In Minnesota, rural communities have the highest food insecurity in the whole state," Smith said. "And in this country, 9 out of 10 (counties) with the highest food insecurity rates are rural."

Rollins testified that she does believe in work requirements, though she conceded she didn't have extensive knowledge of the SNAP.

"I don't fully understand, but plan to get more in the weeds on this, if confirmed," Rollins said. "And working with all of you to make sure that your concerns are part of that education process for me."

Smith took the opportunity to note that SNAP does have work requirements, but that there are exceptions if people "are taking care of a child or an incapacitated person," or if "they are participating in an alcohol or drug treatment program," or if they are "already working under some other programs."

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.

Committee of SD lawmakers endorses ban on immigration sanctuaries

BY: SETH TUPPER - JANUARY 23, 2025 12:21 PM

Sanctuary policies for undocumented immigrants will be banned in South Dakota if legislators adopt a bill that advanced out of a committee Thursday at the Capitol in Pierre.

The name "sanctuary" is often applied to policies that limit state or local cooperation with federal immigration authorities. The bill, from state Sen. Casey Crabtree, R-Madison, would prohibit such policies at the state and local levels. The legislation is based on a law passed in North Dakota. Other states have adopted similar measures, Crabtree said, including Montana, Wyoming and Iowa.

Crabtree said the bill is necessary to ward off policies being adopted in Democratic-leaning states as a backlash against President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown.

"I believe it is time for the Legislature here in South Dakota to make clear that in our state, we will assist federal law enforcement to keep our communities safe," Crabtree said.

The Senate Judiciary Committee, which has no Democratic members, voted unanimously to send the bill to the full Senate. There are nine Democrats in South Dakota's 105-member Legislature, which means the party doesn't have enough members to fill seats on all committees.

Nobody testified against the legislation during the committee hearing.

Taneeza Islam is CEO of South Dakota Voices for Peace, a Sioux Falls-based nonprofit that supports immigrants. In an interview with South Dakota Searchlight, she expressed concern about the state wading into local policies.

"If the Legislature can create policies for local law enforcement, what does that really mean, and does

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it open the door to let them continue to do that with other issues?" Islam said.

But she added that no South Dakota state or local agencies have adopted sanctuary policies and are unlikely to do so given the dominant position of Republicans across the state.

"So, at the end of the day, there is no impact, no effect, and this doesn't add anything to make communities safer or make communities less safe," Islam said.

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

Bill headed to SD Senate would make temporary 911 surcharge increase permanent

Lawmakers bumped monthly amount from \$1.25 to \$2 last year but included a sunset clause

BY: SETH TUPPER - JANUARY 23, 2025 12:05 PM

A South Dakota Senate committee advanced a bill Thursday at the Capitol in Pierre that would make an increase in the state's 911 surcharge permanent.

The monthly, per-line charge applies to landline and cellphone service, and is used to help local governments fund their 911 call centers. Legislators and Gov. Kristi Noem adopted a 75-cent increase in the surcharge last year, from \$1.25 to \$2. The temporary measure is set to expire on July 1, 2026.

The new bill would remove the sunset clause, making the fee increase permanent.

Several people representing state and local 911 organizations testified in favor of the bill, including Jenna Severyn, a lobbyist for the South Dakota Police Chiefs Association.

"This 911 increase does help create a stronger and safer South Dakota," she said.

Before last year, lawmakers had not increased the surcharge since 2012, and it was supporting only 30% of local call centers' operational costs while local governments funded the rest, said Jason Husby, the state's 911 coordinator. He said the increased surcharge is covering about 45% of those costs.

Some legislators on the Senate Judiciary Committee expressed concerns Thursday about call center efficiencies — which were also raised last year — and encouraged Husby to work with call centers to consolidate. Husby said consolidation has already dropped the number of call centers in the state from 43 to 28 in recent years, and he said a newly prepared, statewide report on 911 operations provides a roadmap for further consolidation discussions.

A lobbyist for the wireless phone industry testified against the legislation, saying South Dakotans are paying \$8 million more in surcharges annually because of the increase. He asked lawmakers to delay action on the sunset clause until next winter, which would allow time to study the new report and consider consolidations and efficiencies that might reduce the need for the higher surcharge.

Several lawmakers expressed concerns about the impact of the higher surcharge on South Dakotans' finances, but nevertheless voted for the measure.

The single no vote against six yes votes came from the committee chairman, Sen. David Wheeler, R-Huron, who said he's concerned about the state's lack of control over the money and its inability to require consolidation by local call centers. But he also said he recognizes the need for an increased surcharge, and his no vote in the committee "doesn't mean I'm not going to vote yes" when the bill comes up for a vote by the full Senate.

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

Troops dispatched to border 'just the beginning' of deployments, Pentagon says

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JANUARY 23, 2025 11:08 AM

WASHINGTON — Acting Secretary of Defense Robert Salesses said the deployment of additional active duty troops to the U.S.-Mexico border "is just the beginning" — even as border crossings remain at their lowest point in months.

The Pentagon will immediately send 1,500 ground personnel to monitor the southwest border and crew additional helicopters that are also being sent, he said late Wednesday.

Troops are also expected to build temporary and permanent barriers along the border, and provide military airlifts to the Department of Homeland Security to deport up to 5,000 immigrants who lack specific legal authorization from the San Diego, California, and El Paso, Texas, areas, he said.

President Donald Trump declared an emergency at the border Monday, among issuing several other immigration-related executive orders.

Salesses said the shift means a 60% increase in active-duty ground forces at the border. Former President Joe Biden had already sent troops to the border in 2023 as crossings at that time surged. About 2,500 troops are already there.

Encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border have been on a steady downward trend since March 2024 and remain at the lowest levels since 2022, according to data tracked by U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

The agency's term "encounters" encompasses people who attempt to cross between official ports of entry, as well as families, individuals and unaccompanied children who arrive at official entry points seeking humanitarian protection.

The U.S. military, by law, is prohibited from being used as a police force within the United States, so troops' duties at the border will largely be intelligence gathering and logistics, including transportation.

Reporting back on Insurrection Act

Among his executive actions Monday, Trump ordered leadership at the Pentagon and Homeland Security to report back in 90 days on whether Trump should invoke the Insurrection Act, an 1807 law that allows the military to begin domestic law enforcement.

U.S. Northern Command, or USNORTHCOM, will be in charge of duties at the border. The command, which has few permanently assigned forces, leads missions that focus on homeland defense and civil support when directed by the president or secretary of defense. The U.S. Transportation Command and the National Guard Bureau will assist.

"President Trump directed action from the Department of Defense on securing our nation's borders and made clear he expects immediate results," Salesses said in a statement. "That is exactly what our military is doing under his leadership."

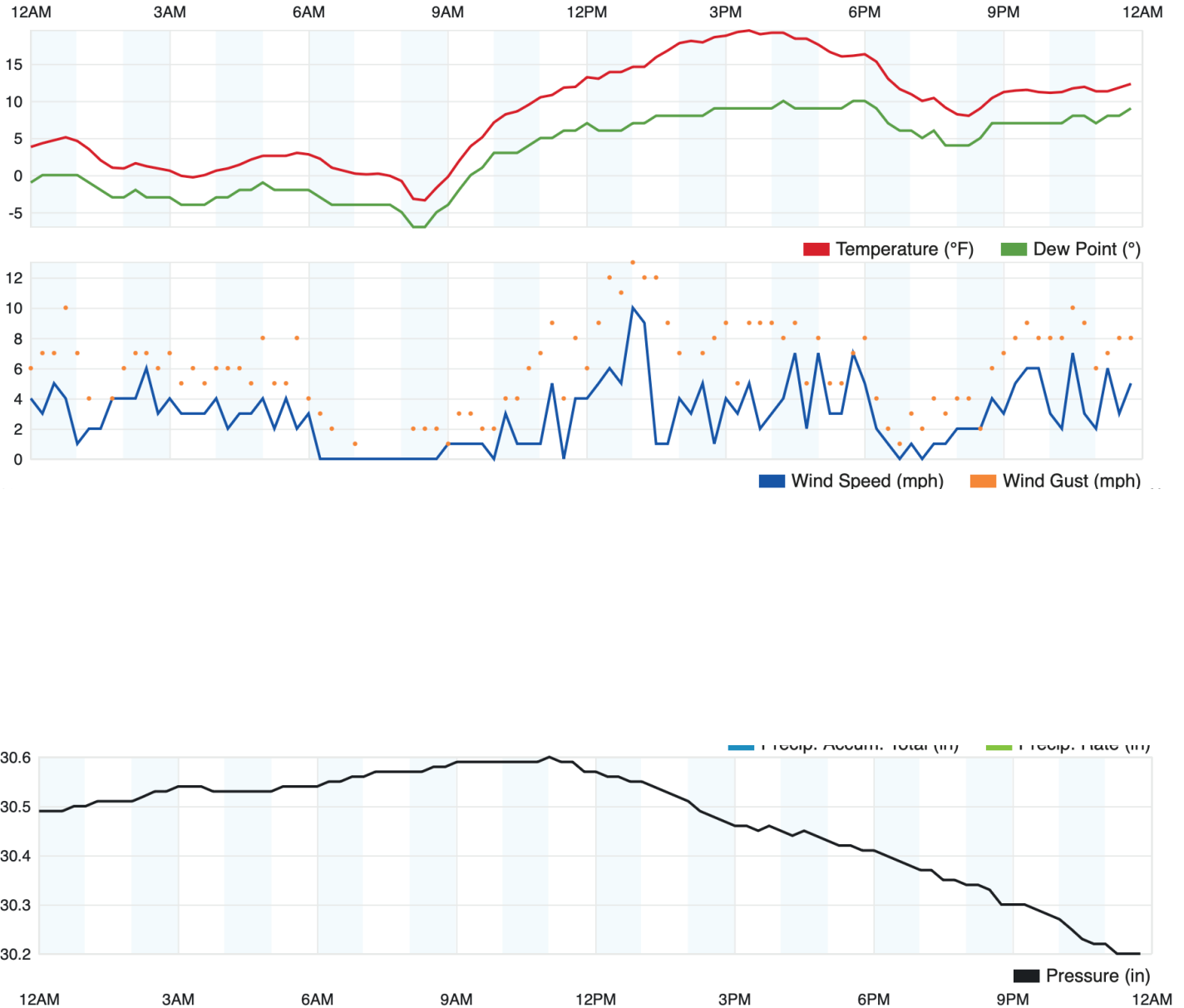
The Pentagon referred all questions to Northern Command. Specific military units will be announced "as soon as deployment orders have been released," USNORTHCOM said in a statement Thursday. The command did not answer a question about where troops will be stationed.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Friday



High: 36 °F

Chance Snow
then Mostly
Cloudy

Friday Night



Low: 14 °F

Partly Cloudy

Saturday



High: 25 °F

Mostly Sunny
and Blustery

Saturday Night



Low: 6 °F

Mostly Clear

Sunday

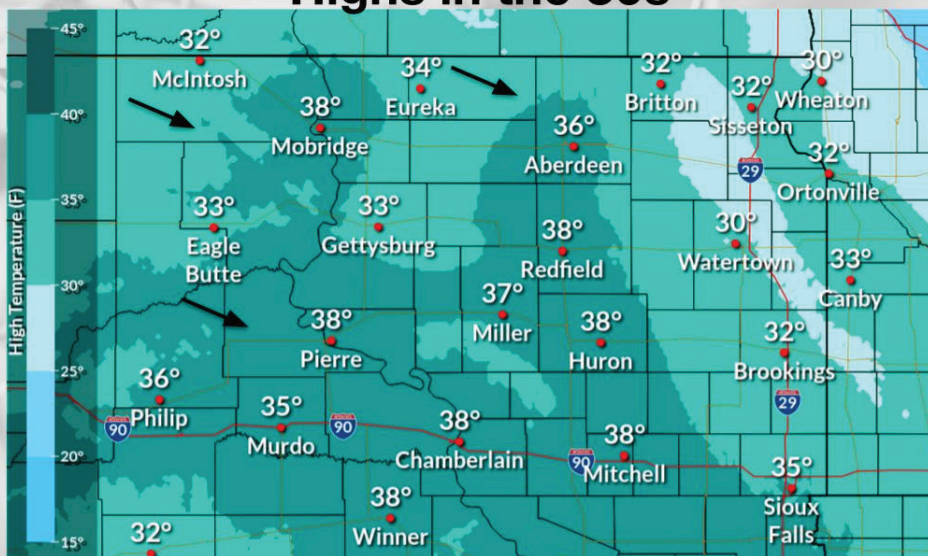


High: 34 °F

Sunny then
Sunny and
Breezy

Warmer Weather Today...

Highs in the 30s



Winds out of the northwest **gusting 30-40 mph** over central SD

Light **snow of half an inch or less** over northern & northeastern SD into western MN



Highs will top out in the 30s today with winds out of the northwest gusting 30-40mph over central SD. Light snow of half an inch or less can be expected over northern and northeastern SD into west central MN. Looking ahead for the weekend, temperatures will top out in the 20s Saturday and return to the 30s Sunday.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 20 °F at 3:28 PM

Low Temp: -4 °F at 8:26 AM

Wind: 13 mph at 12:45 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 30 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 60 in 1981

Record Low: -35 in 1915

Average High: 24

Average Low: 1

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.44

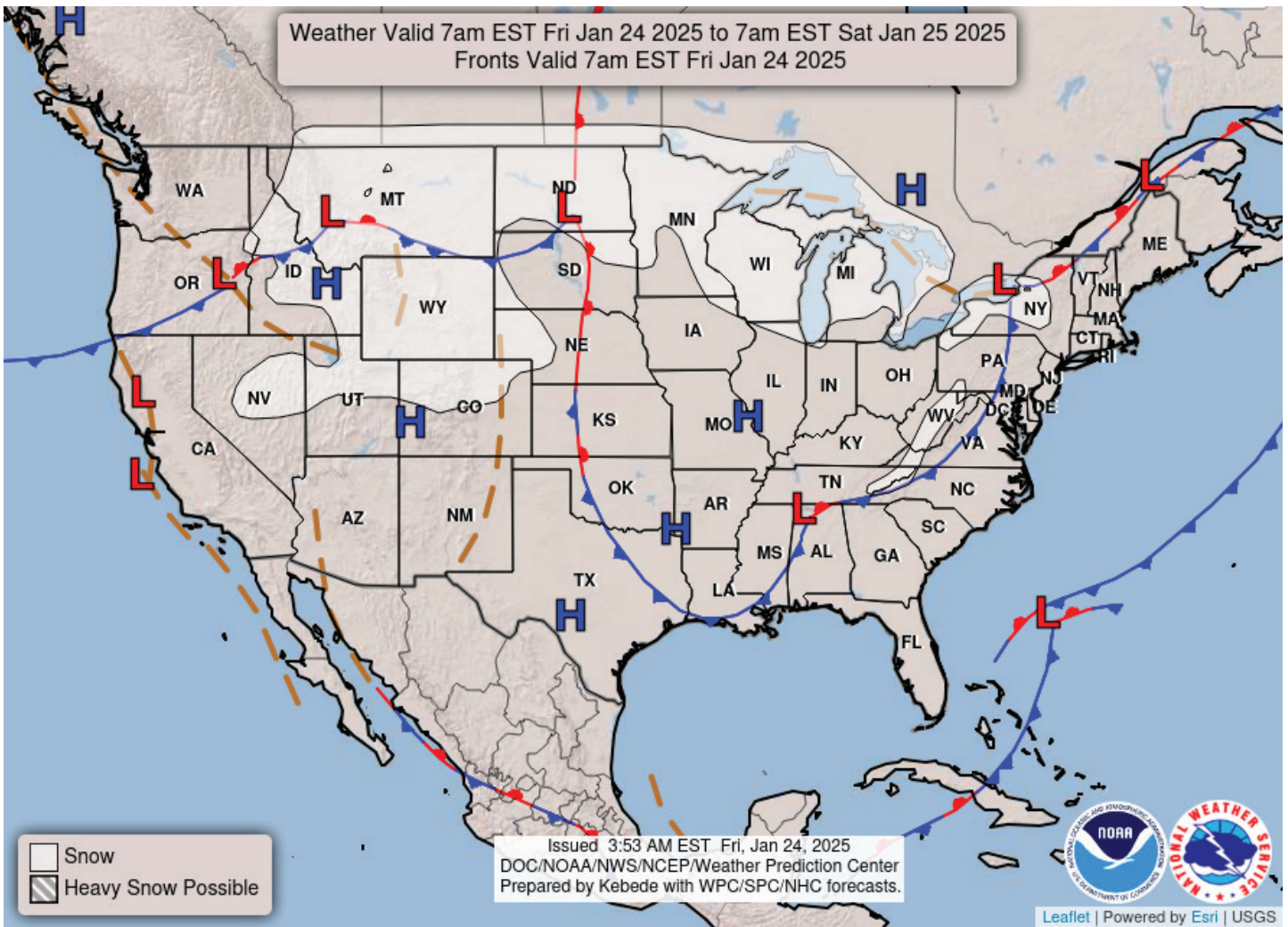
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.44

Precip Year to Date: 21.71

Sunset Tonight: 5:29:44 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:58:29 am



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Today in Weather History

January 24, 1972: Snowfall of a dusting to as much as 8 inches accompanied by 30 to 40 mph winds resulted in widespread blowing and drifting snow across much of South Dakota. Many roads were blocked by drifting snow. Visibilities were near zero at times. Many activities were canceled or postponed.

January 24, 1985: Blizzard conditions associated with an Arctic front moved into western Minnesota and northeast South Dakota during the afternoon and continued into the evening. The blizzard brought travel to a standstill. Winds increased to 40 to 60 mph. Many roads were closed due to drifts of snow. Temperatures fell rapidly behind the front with wind chills of 30 to 50 below zero overnight. There were some accidents and stranded motorists. Many vehicles went into the ditch, with many people stranded. The National Guard was called upon to search for stranded motorists. Portions of northeast South Dakota experienced near-blizzard conditions as wind speeds gusted to near 60 mph with dangerous travel conditions.

1916 - The temperature at Browning MT plunged 100 degrees in just 24 hours, from 44 degrees above zero to 56 degrees below zero. It was a record 24 hour temperature drop for the U.S. (Weather Channel) (National Severe Storms Forecast Center)

1935 - Snowstorms hit the northeastern U.S. and the Pacific Northwest producing record 24 hour snowfall totals of 23 inches at Portland ME and 52 inches at Winthrop MA. (David Ludlum)

1940: A record-breaking 19.9 inches of snow fell in Richmond, Virginia, on this day. The storm, which began on the 23rd, produced 21.6 inches of snow for the Richmond area. The headline in the Richmond Times-Dispatch was "Blizzard Sweeps State, Bringing Deep Snow; Public Schools Closed." Click [HERE](#) for more information from the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

1956 - Thirty-eight inches of rain deluged the Kilauea Sugar Plantation of Hawaii in 24 hours, including twelve inches in just one hour. (David Ludlum)

1963 - A great arctic outbreak reached the southern U.S. The cold wave broke many records for duration of cold weather along the Gulf Coast. A reading of 15 degrees below zero at Nashville TN was an all-time record low for that location. (David Ludlum)

1967: A tornado outbreak across the Central U.S. was the furthest north ever recorded in the winter up to that time. Severe weather occurred across a good portion of the southeast and east-central Iowa. Two-inch hail fell at Armstrong, and over two dozen tornadoes were reported. Five miles north of Fort Madison, one fatality occurred from a tornado, along with six injuries. A tornado causing F4 damage killed 3 people and injured 216 in St. Louis County, Missouri. Storms also affected parts of northern and central Illinois. One strong tornado in Mason County killed one person and injured three others. Another tornado moved across the Champaign-Urbana metropolitan area, injuring five people. Other strong tornadoes were reported across Carroll County in Mt. Carroll, where 12 people were injured, and near Gladstone in Henderson County. Funnel clouds were reported across the southwest section of Chicago, IL. Iowa had never recorded a tornado in January before this outbreak. 32 total tornadoes occurred, 14 of them in Iowa. Nine twisters occurred in Missouri, 8 in Illinois, and 1 in Wisconsin.

1982 - Chinook winds plagued the foothills of southeastern Wyoming and northern and central Colorado for the second straight Sunday. The winds gusted to 140 mph at Wondervu CO, located northeast of Denver. Chinook winds a week earlier produced wind gusts to 137 mph. (Storm Data)

1987 - Temperatures in Minnesota plunged far below the zero mark. International Falls MN reported a morning low of 35 degrees below zero, and Warroad MN was the cold spot in the nation with a low of 45 below zero. A storm developing in northeastern Texas produced severe thunderstorms with large hail in Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas. Camden AR reported golf ball size hail. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A blizzard rapidly developed in the north central U.S. In just one hour weather conditions in eastern North Dakota switched from sunny skies, light winds and temperature readings in the 20s, to rapidly falling temperatures and near zero visibility in snow and blowing snow. High winds in Wyoming, gusting to 72 mph at Gillette, produced snow drifts sixteen feet high. Northwestern Iowa experienced its second blizzard in just 24 hours. High winds in Iowa produced wind chill readings as cold as 65 degrees below zero. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



WHERE TO FIND HAPPINESS

A professor was known to ask his students questions to make them think. On one occasion he stood before the class and wrote on the chalkboard, "Who's more content – the man with six million dollars or the man with six children? Now think!" he challenged them.

After a few moments, one of the students raised his hand and answered, "The man with the six children."

"Oh? Why?" asked the professor.

"Well, the man with the six million dollars would always want more!" came the reply.

True contentment is always independent of "things" – whether possessions or pleasures. It only comes from an inner attitude toward life. That is why Paul said, "True religion, with contentment, is great wealth."

This does not imply that being a Christian means living in poverty or wanting to be poor. But it does mean that the attraction of "things" will never bring true happiness or satisfaction, and that the Christian must always focus on things that are eternal.

In the final analysis, we can only take two things to heaven: Ourselves, through His grace, and those who we have let to the Lord through witnessing His grace to others.

So, we must live our lives with one goal: that is: to present ourselves to God without shame and share His grace with the lost..

Prayer: Help us, Father, to realize that life does not consist in the abundance of things, but in pleasing You and doing Your will. May we center our lives on things eternal. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: True religion, with contentment, is great wealth. 1 Timothy 6:6

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: 17 Hrs 24 Mins 2 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: 1 Days 16 Hrs 39 Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.23.25

9 13 18 24 46 6

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 54 Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.22.25

6 17 21 24 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 54 Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.22.25

1 12 39 40 52 15

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 23 Mins 2 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: 1 Days 17 Hrs 23 Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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Upcoming Groton Events

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

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Roncalli 49, Clark-Willow Lake 43
Alcester-Hudson 49, Irene-Wakonda 40
Avon 45, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 38
Belle Fourche 41, Winner 34
Bennett County 50, Todd County 27
Brandon Valley 59, T F Riggs High School 43
Canton 59, Parker 28
Castlewood 65, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 29
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 69, Dupree 38
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 69, Little Wound 38
Colman-Egan 67, Elkton-Lake Benton 12
Dell Rapids 48, Garretson 29
Deuel 59, Tiospa Zina 39
Douglas 38, Hot Springs 27
Elk Point-Jefferson 36, Akron-Westfield, Iowa 29
Ethan 52, Corsica/Stickney 48
Freeman 53, Scotland/Menno 28
Groton 42, Milbank 34
Hamlin 61, Redfield 11
Hanson 35, Canistota 16
Howard 56, Bridgewater-Emery 40
Ipswich 49, Faulkton 41
Kadoka 48, New Underwood 20
Lennox 46, West Central 40
Lyman 70, Burke 35
Miller 65, Chamberlain 23
Mitchell 59, Tea 45
Northwestern 49, Leola-Frederick High School 30
Parkston 57, Bon Homme 26
Santee, Neb. 55, Marty 39
Sioux Falls Jefferson 58, Harrisburg 54
Sisseton 70, Webster 45
Sully Buttes 38, Stanley County 26
Viborg-Hurley 55, Baltic 24
Wall 52, Philip 45
Waubay/Summit 42, Aberdeen Christian 18
Waverly-South Shore 41, Langford 35
White River 64, Gregory 46
281 Conference Tournament=
Championship=
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 64, Highmore-Harrold 43
Third Place=
Wessington Springs 46, Hitchcock-Tulare 45

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Fifth Place=

Wolsey-Wessington 45, Iroquois-Lake Preston 33

Seventh Place=

Sunshine Bible Academy 38, James Valley Christian School 31

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Alcester-Hudson 49, Irene-Wakonda 40

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 65, Avon 60, OT

Bison 56, Takini 39

Brandon Valley 68, T F Riggs High School 57

Castlewood 63, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 21

Centerville 76, Sioux Falls Lutheran 51

Chamberlain 54, Miller 53

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 71, Lower Brule 52

Clark-Willow Lake 60, Aberdeen Roncalli 29

Dell Rapids 43, Madison 37

Deuel 89, Tiospa Zina 30

Elkton-Lake Benton 70, Colman-Egan 65

Ethan 66, Corsica/Stickney 57

Freeman 73, Scotland/Menno 37

Freeman Academy-Marion 77, Mitchell Christian 46

Gregory 61, Kimball-White Lake 27

Groton 58, Milbank 43

Hamlin 87, Redfield 24

Hanson 56, Canistota 52

Howard 48, Bridgewater-Emery 45

Leola-Frederick High School 75, Northwestern 49

Lyman 61, Burke 21

Mitchell 53, Tea 49

North Central 56, Herreid-Selby 36

Parker 50, Canton 46

Parkston 65, Bon Homme 31

Santee, Neb. 73, Marty 59

Sioux Falls Christian 74, Vermillion 61

Sioux Valley 58, Deubrook 43

St. Francis Indian 77, Crazy Horse 57

Viborg-Hurley 73, Baltic 42

Waubay/Summit 43, Aberdeen Christian 41

Webster 55, Sisseton 49

Wessington Springs 58, Wolsey-Wessington 56

West Central 47, Lennox 42

Winner 55, Bennett County 24

281 Conference Tournament=

Fifth Place=

James Valley Christian School 56, Highmore-Harrold 51

Seventh Place=

Hitchcock-Tulare 69, Sunshine Bible Academy 50

Third Place=

Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 60, Iroquois-Lake Preston 38

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

Cluff scores 23, South Dakota State takes down Kansas City 65-64

By The Associated Press undefined

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Oscar Cluff's 23 points helped South Dakota State defeat Kansas City 65-64 on Thursday night.

Matthew Mors made two free throws with 2:39 left to give SDSU a 65-62 lead.

Cluff also contributed 19 rebounds and four blocks for the Jackrabbits (13-8, 4-2 Summit League). Mors scored 10 points, shooting 3 of 3 from the field and 3 for 4 from the line.

Kansas City (10-11, 2-4) was led by Anderson Kopp, who posted 19 points. The Roos also got 11 points and two steals from Jayson Petty.

Both teams play on Saturday. South Dakota State hosts South Dakota and Kansas City hosts St. Thomas.

On Dakota prairie, home of Trump's DHS pick, immigration crackdown threatens way of life, economy

By JOSHUA GOODMAN and JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — On a face-numbingly frigid afternoon last week, Gov. Kristi Noem used a farewell address to South Dakotans to warn of an "invasion" far away from the state's windswept prairies and freedom-loving farmers.

The "illegal aliens" and "got-aways" crossing the southern border, the governor said, pose an existential threat to the U.S. economy and national security, spreading cartel violence and deadly drugs.

"We see the consequences of Washington's inaction here," said Noem, President Donald Trump's pick to lead the Department of Homeland Security, a job that would put her at the forefront of the administration's promised immigration crackdown. "Even known terrorists have crossed the border amongst the illegals — and they could be anywhere."

But Noem's heated rhetoric belies a stark reality: With unemployment at 1.9% — the lowest in the country — her state faces an acute labor shortage and has grown increasingly dependent on the same migrants she may be tasked with deporting.

It's those migrants, many in the U.S. illegally, who provide the low-paid labor powering the booming slaughterhouses, dairy farms and construction sites in South Dakota. And any immigration actions spearheaded by Noem, who is expected to be confirmed by the Senate in coming days, could have crippling consequences for businesses in her own backyard.

That disconnect reflects a broader clash with fellow Republicans here who say she's put her own ambition for higher office ahead of local needs.

The tension is most apparent in her embrace of Trump's hardline stance on immigration. Whether it's expressing support for a "Muslim ban" during Trump's first administration, or dispatching South Dakota's national guard to the southern border "war zone" more than 1,000 miles away, Noem has left little doubt she will follow Trump's orders.

And that is what is terrifying migrants, business owners and advocates alike.

"If strict enforcement comes into play, we're going to drown in our own red meat," said Ray Epp, a hog farmer and former Yankton County commissioner, who noted the unparalleled work ethic — and growing presence — of migrant laborers in the state's pork industry. "There'd be a crash."

Nitza Rubenstein, a community activist who works closely with migrants, was even more blunt: "Who's going to milk the cows? If the Latinos don't, nobody will."

Freedom fighter brand of politics

In Noem's telling, her father's death in a farming accident in 1994 produced a political awakening that would come to define her small government, freedom fighter brand of politics.

Pregnant at the time, she dropped out of college to take the reins of the family business — soon feuding

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with bureaucrats over what she called a "death tax" that nearly bankrupted the ranch.

"Overseeing all the operations was eye-opening," she wrote in "No Going Back," an autobiography that drew scorn last year for describing how she killed a rambunctious puppy. "The government had its hand in everything we did."

Twelve years later, at the urging of Tom Daschle, then the top Democrat in the U.S. Senate, Noem ran for the state Legislature — as a Republican. An unbeaten string of eight electoral victories followed on her way to Congress and then the top office in the Mount Rushmore State.

Noem won those races thanks to a homespun and hard-knuckled approach to politics. As if to emphasize her reputation for bashing opponents, she ended her State of the State address last week handing her longtime lieutenant governor a signed baseball bat.

"This used to be an old men's club," said Jim Smith, the Capitol's longtime sergeant at arms, who remembers when lawmakers kept whisky bottles on their desk and filled the chambers with cigar smoke. "You need sharp elbows to survive."

Wooing Trump

She catapulted to national prominence in 2020 as South Dakota rejected COVID-19 restrictions and remained open for business during the pandemic. That year she also wooed Trump to Mount Rushmore for a Fourth of July fireworks display over the objection of federal bureaucrats concerned about potential wildfires.

As her national profile has risen, South Dakota's first female governor feuded repeatedly with state Republican lawmakers who said they believe she has been more focused on auditioning for Trump than on the state's needs. Those fights range from her use of a government plane to attend out-of-state political events, state funding for a shooting range the Legislature previously rejected and a pipeline project she backed over the objections of landowners.

"Valuable time has been wasted on one person's political aspirations while life-changing issues have gone on the back burner," said Steven Haugaard, a former speaker of the South Dakota House of Representatives who challenged Noem in 2022 for the Republican nomination for governor, garnering 24% of the vote.

As her political ambition outgrew the newly fenced-in governor's residence in Pierre, Noem increasingly has turned her attention to immigration, though her record was not always as harsh as her rhetoric.

In 2019, for example, Noem rejected an offer by the first Trump administration to stop South Dakota's cooperation with a U.S. State Department program to resettle refugees. It's not clear how she feels about that program now. In her address last week, she criticized programs that have allowed "many thousands who caught a free plane ride over our borders courtesy of the federal government."

At her Senate confirmation hearing last week, Democrats questioned Noem's qualifications for the job. As DHS secretary, she'll be charged with managing the third-largest federal agency, with 240,000 employees and a budget of \$108 billion — more than 15 times the spending of South Dakota, with just 13,000 workers.

The sprawling department is not only responsible for running immigration and border policy but oversees agencies investigating terrorism and cybersecurity threats as well as the U.S. Coast Guard, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. Secret Service.

When asked how she would protect rural states from work shortages while carrying out Trump's deportation plans, she offered few details other than to say she'll focus initially on what she claimed were 425,000 migrants with criminal convictions.

The number of migrants encountered trying to enter the U.S. skyrocketed under President Joe Biden, peaking in December 2023, when officials reported 301,000 encounters at the border. But they've since ebbed to less than a third that amount.

"Migrants who come here want to work," said Taneeza Islam, a lawyer and co-founder of South Dakota Voices for Peace, an advocacy group. "Noem knows that."

Noem, 53, didn't respond to repeated interview requests but has left little doubt on how she will run DHS.

"We will ensure that our borders are secure," she told the committee, "and we're addressing all threats that may come in from any direction."

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Migrants, business owners are anxious about crackdown

Among those bracing for the crackdown is a young Guatemalan couple living without legal status in a prairie hamlet about an hour from Noem's homestead.

Yoni and Petrona fell in love in South Dakota after each handed over their life's savings to human smugglers, known as coyotes, to guide them across the U.S. border during the pandemic.

Like many migrants interviewed by the AP, the two lack health insurance, a driver's license and can't open a bank account. But that hasn't stopped them from finding work.

Within two weeks of arriving, Yoni, just 15 at the time, landed a job at the local egg farm for \$12 an hour with a fake green card he bought for \$150. He now earns double that in construction and says he's able to wire more remittances to family in Guatemala than friends who settled in California because rent in his state is cheap.

The couple's dream is to gain legal status — or save enough to return home and provide their 18-month-old daughter, who was born in the U.S., a better upbringing than the one they had. The Associated Press agreed not to disclose the couple's last names because they are afraid of being arrested and deported.

"Things are a little bit better here," Yoni said in Spanish on a rare day off because his employer suspended work due to the extreme cold. "At least I know that if I work hard here I'll get paid."

The couple, who spoke to the AP days before Trump was sworn in, live in fear that Noem will follow through on the threats and one day separate them from their daughter.

"I've heard that they're only going to deport the mothers and the kids will stay here," said Petrona. "Imagine that."

But those fears, stoked by Trump and Noem, don't match the warm welcome migrants described in nearby Huron, where on a recent evening a red wolf moon flooded the desolate plains surrounding the town's turkey plant.

A co-op of ethnic German Hutterite farmers, who arrived in the 19th century, own the Dakota Provisions plant. But migrants from Venezuela, Thailand and other countries, earning around \$14 per hour, perform the dangerous, back-breaking work.

Huron, population 14,000, flourished with the arrival of the railroad in the 1880s, attracting migrants from all over Europe. But when the rail depot fell into disuse in the 1960s, the city began a long decline: a college closed, businesses shuttered and families uprooted.

Migrants are now fueling something of a rural renaissance.

The first contingent arrived some 20 years ago from Mexico and Central America. The latest are refugees fleeing ethnic violence in Myanmar. At the Beadle County courthouse, translation services are now offered in seven languages: Arabic, French, Karen, Nepali, Russian, Spanish and Swahili. A beef processing plant that is about to break ground is expected to attract even more foreign workers.

All the while, the town's high school soccer team has become competitive. A half-dozen Latin bodegas sell exotic foods. And once-abandoned parks are brimming with families.

"It's not an invasion — it's an invitation," said Todd Manolis, owner of Manolis Grocery on Main Street. "There were lots of growing pains at first. But without a doubt they saved us."

On a recent afternoon, as Manolis waited on customers who chewed the fat and bought goods on store credit, the owner pointed to the store's license hanging from a wall. It showed the business had been started a century ago — by Manolis' grandfather, shortly after his arrival as an immigrant from Greece.

On Dakota prairie, home of Trump's DHS pick, immigration crackdown threatens way of life, economy

By JOSHUA GOODMAN and JIM MUSTIAN The Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — On a face-numbingly frigid afternoon last week, Gov. Kristi Noem used a farewell address to South Dakotans to warn of an "invasion" far away from the state's windswept prairies and freedom-loving farmers.

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But Noem’s heated rhetoric belies a stark reality: With unemployment at 1.9% — the lowest in the country — her state faces an acute labor shortage and has grown increasingly dependent on the same migrants she may be tasked with deporting.

It’s those migrants, many in the U.S. illegally, who provide the low-paid labor powering the booming slaughterhouses, dairy farms and construction sites in Noem’s home state. And any immigration actions spearheaded by Noem, likely to be confirmed as soon as this week, could have crippling consequences for businesses in her own backyard.

That disconnect reflects a broader clash with fellow Republicans here who say she’s put her own ambition for higher office ahead of local needs.

The tension is most apparent in her embrace of Trump’s hardline stance on immigration. Whether it’s expressing support for a “Muslim ban” during Trump’s first administration, or dispatching South Dakota’s national guard to the southern border “war zone” more than 1,000 miles away, Noem has left little doubt she will follow Trump’s orders.

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Trump targets California water policy as he prepares to tour LA fire damage

By AMY TAXIN Associated Press

As President Donald Trump prepares to tour wildfire damage in California, he's zeroing in on one of his frequent targets for criticism: State water policy.

Since the fires broke out Jan. 7, Trump has used social media and interviews to accuse the state of sending too much water to the Pacific Ocean instead of south toward Los Angeles and highlighted how some hydrants ran dry in the early hours of the firefight in Pacific Palisades.

In the first hours of his second term, Trump called on federal officials to draft plans to route more water to the crop-rich Central Valley and densely populated cities in the southern part of the state. Two days later he threatened to withhold federal disaster aid unless California leaders change the state's approach on water.

Here's a look at the facts behind Trump's comments and what power the president has to influence California water:

Where does Southern California's water come from?

In general, most of the state's water is in the north, while most of its people are in the drier south.

Los Angeles, the nation's second largest city, depends on drawing water from elsewhere. Meanwhile the relatively dry Central Valley is home to fertile land where much of the nation's fruits and vegetables are grown.

Two complex systems of dams and canals channel rain and snowmelt from the mountains in the north and route it south. One is managed by the federal government and known as the Central Valley Project, while the other is operated by the state of California and known as the State Water Project.

Both transport water through the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, an estuary that provides critical habitat to fish and wildlife including salmon and the delta smelt, one of Trump's fascinations.

Southern California gets about half its water from local supplies such as groundwater, according to the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, a regional water wholesaler. Metropolitan provides the rest of the water from state supplies and the federally managed Colorado River system.

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power also manages its own aqueducts that draw water from the eastern Sierra Nevada.

What does Washington have the power to do?

Federal officials guide how much is routed to the delta to protect threatened species and how much goes to Central Valley Project users, mostly farms. That project does not supply water to Los Angeles.

State officials are expected to follow the same environmental guidelines, said Caitlin Peterson, a research fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California's Water Policy Center.

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Federal and state officials typically coordinate how they operate those systems.

The delta connects inland waterways to the Pacific, and keeping a certain amount of water flowing through helps support fish populations and the waterway itself.

But Trump and others say the state lets too much water go to the ocean rather than cities and farms.

What measures did Trump take on California water policies in the past?

His prior administration allowed more water to be directed to the Central Valley and out of the delta. Environmental groups opposed that, saying it would harm endangered species.

Gov. Gavin Newsom filed a lawsuit saying the rules would drive endangered fish populations to extinction. There were concerns about the tiny delta smelt, which is seen as an indicator of the waterway's health, as well as chinook salmon and steelhead trout, which return annually from the Pacific to spawn in freshwater rivers.

Then-President Joe Biden's administration issued its own rules in December that environmental groups said provided modest improvements over those of the first Trump administration.

What is Trump's position now?

He has continued to question how California's water managed. Last year on his Truth Social platform, he criticized the "rerouting of MILLIONS OF GALLONS OF WATER A DAY FROM THE NORTH OUT INTO THE PACIFIC OCEAN, rather than using it, free of charge, for the towns, cities, & farms dotted all throughout California."

Such comments buoyed the spirits of many farmers and water managers in the Central Valley who say federal water allocations have been too limited in the past two years since ample rain boosted reservoir levels. A series of major storms in 2023 helped California emerge from a multi-year drought, but dry conditions have started to return in the central and southern parts of the state.

Trump has now directed the federal government again to route more water in the system it controls to farmers and cities.

What does all this have to do with the Los Angeles fires?

Not much. The farms-versus-fish debate is one of the most well-worn in California water politics and doesn't always fall along party lines. Some environmentalists think Newsom is too friendly to farming interests. But that debate is not connected to fire-related water troubles in Los Angeles.

Trump has suggested that state officials "turn the valve" to send more water to the city. But state water supplies are not to blame for hydrants running dry and a key reservoir near Pacific Palisades that was not filled.

The problem with the hydrants was that they were overstressed, and the Santa Ynez Reservoir was empty because it was undergoing maintenance.

Newsom has called for an investigation into how the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power managed both issues.

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California has enough water in storage to meet roughly three years of water demand, said Deven Upadhyay, the agency's interim general manager.

"We can deliver what our agencies need," he said.

If the Trump administration chooses to route more water to system users, that won't necessarily benefit Los Angeles, Upadhyay said.

Unless there is coordination between the federal and state systems, greater draws from the delta on the federal side could lead California officials to cut allocations to cities and farms to protect waterway, he added.

Freedom is bittersweet for Palestinians released from Israeli jails

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

RAMALLAH, West Bank (AP) — When Dania Hanatsheh was released from an Israeli jail this week and dropped off by bus into a sea of jubilant Palestinians in Ramallah, it was an uncomfortable déjà vu.

After nearly five months of detention, it was the second time the 22-year-old woman had been freed as

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part of a deal between Israel and Hamas to pause the war in Gaza.

Hanatsheh's elation at being free again is tinged with sadness about the devastation in Gaza, she said, as well as uncertainty about whether she could be detained in the future — a common feeling in her community.

"Palestinian families are prepared to be arrested at any moment," said Hanatsheh, one of 90 women and teenagers released by Israel during the first phase of the ceasefire deal. "You feel helpless like you can't do anything to protect yourself."

Nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners are to be released as part of a deal to halt the fighting for six weeks, free 33 hostages from Gaza, and increase fuel and aid deliveries to the territory. Many of the prisoners to be released have been detained for infractions such as throwing stones or Molotov cocktails, while others are convicted of killing Israelis.

Hanatsheh was first arrested in November 2023, just weeks into the war triggered by Hamas' deadly attack on Israel. She was freed days later during a weeklong ceasefire in which hundreds of Palestinians were released in exchange for nearly half of the roughly 250 hostages Hamas and others dragged into Gaza.

She was detained again in August, when Israeli troops burst through her door, using an explosive, she said.

On neither occasion was she told why she'd been arrested, she said. A list maintained by Israel's justice ministry says Hanatsheh was detained for "supporting terror," although she was never charged or given a trial and doesn't belong to any militant group.

Her story resonates across Palestinian society, where nearly every family — in Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem — has a relative who has spent time in an Israeli jail. This has left scars on generations of families, leaving fewer breadwinners and forcing children to grow up without one or both parents for long stretches.

Since the start of the war 15 months ago, the number of Palestinians in Israeli jails has doubled to more than 10,000, a figure that includes detainees from Gaza, and several thousand arrested in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, according to Hamoked, an Israeli legal group.

Many prisoners are never told why they were detained. Israel's "administrative detention" policy allows it to jail people — as it did with Hanatsheh — based on secret evidence, without publicly charging them or ever holding a trial. Only intelligence officers or judges know the charges, said Amjad Abu Asab, head of the Detainees' Parents Committee in Jerusalem.

Under the terms of the ceasefire, the Palestinian prisoners released by Israel cannot be later rearrested on the same charges, or returned to jail to finish serving time for past offenses. Prisoners are not required to sign any document upon their release.

The conditions for Palestinian prisoners deteriorated greatly after the war in Gaza began. The country's then-national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, boasted last year that prisons will no longer be "summer camps" under his watch.

Several of the prisoners released this week said they lacked adequate food and medical care and that they were forced to sleep in cramped cells.

Men and women prisoners in Israel are routinely beaten and sprayed with pepper gas, and they are deprived of family visits or a change of clothes, said Khalida Jarrar, the most prominent detainee freed.

For years, Jarrar, 62, has been in and out of prison as a leading member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a leftist faction with an armed wing that has carried out attacks on Israelis.

Human Rights Watch has decried Jarrar's repeated arrests — she was last detained late in 2023 — as part of an unjust Israeli crackdown on non-violent political opposition.

At an event in Ramallah to welcome home the newly released prisoners, Jarrar greeted a long line of well-wishers. But not everyone was celebrating. Some families worried the ceasefire wouldn't last long enough for their relatives to be freed.

During the ceasefire's first phase, Israel and Hamas and mediators from Qatar, the U.S. and Egypt will try to agree upon a second phase, in which all remaining hostages in Gaza would be released in exchange

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for more Palestinian prisoners, a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and a "sustainable calm." Negotiations on the second phase begin on the sixteenth day of the ceasefire.

For Yassar Saadat, the first release of prisoners was a particularly bittersweet moment. His mother, Abla Abdelrasoul, was freed after being under "administrative detention" since September, according to the justice ministry, which said her crime was "security to the state - other." But his father — one of the most high-profile prisoners in Israel — remains behind bars.

"We don't know if he'll be released, but we don't lose hope," he said. His father, Ahmad Saadat, is a leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine who was convicted of killing an Israeli Cabinet minister in 2001 and has been serving a 30-year sentence.

It's unclear if he'll be released and, even if he is, whether he'll be able to see his family. The ceasefire agreement says all Palestinian prisoners convicted of deadly attacks who are released will be exiled, either to Gaza or abroad, and barred from ever returning to Israel or the West Bank.

The release of some convicted murderers is a sore spot for many Israelis, and particularly those whose relatives were killed.

Micah Avni's father, Richard Lakin, was shot and stabbed to death by a member of Hamas on a public bus in 2015 and his killer's name is on the list of prisoners to be freed in phase one. While Avni is grateful that more hostages in Gaza are beginning to come home, he doesn't believe it'll lead to long-term peace between Israel and Hamas.

"These deals come with a huge, huge cost of life and there are going to be many, many, many more people murdered in the future by the people who were released," he said.

Israel has a history of agreeing to lopsided exchanges. In 2011, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu agreed to release more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for a single Israeli soldier, Gilad Schalit, taken hostage by Hamas.

One of the prisoners released during that deal was Hamas' former top leader, Yahya Sinwar, a mastermind of the Oct. 7 attack who was killed by Israeli troops in Gaza last year.

Some Palestinians said the lopsided exchanges of prisoners for hostages is justified by Israel's seemingly arbitrary detention policies. Others said, for now, all they want to focus on is lost time with their families.

Amal Shujaeiah said she spent more than seven months in prison, accused by Israel of partaking in pro-Palestinian events at her university and hosting a podcast that talked about the war in Gaza.

Back home, the 21-year-old beamed as she embraced friends and relatives.

"Today I am among my family and loved ones, indescribable joy ... a moment of freedom that makes you forget the sorrow."

Syria's economic pains far from over despite Assad's ouster

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Samir al-Baghdad grabbed his pickaxe and walked up a wobbly set of stairs made of cinderblocks and rubble.

He is rebuilding his destroyed family house in the Qaboun neighborhood near Damascus, Syria's capital.

The traditional building, which once housed his family, parents and some relatives, had a courtyard decorated with plants and tiled floors where guests were received. But the house, like scores of others nearby, has been reduced to heaps of rubble during years of civil war.

Al-Baghdadi can't afford to hire workers or rent a bulldozer to clear the debris and fix the house. He makes just about enough money as a mechanic to feed his family. But he's desperate to rebuild it because he is struggling to pay skyrocketing rent for an apartment.

"Economic opportunities are basically nonexistent," al-Baghdadi said, sitting on a pile of rubble and debris where the house's entrance used to be. "So we're going to slowly rebuild with our own hands."

Although Syrian President Bashar Assad was toppled last month in a lightning insurgency, the country's dire economic conditions that protesters decried have not changed.

The economy has been battered by corruption and 13 years of civil war. Coupled with international sanc-

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tions and mismanagement, inflation skyrocketed, pulling some 90% of the country into poverty. Over half the population -- some 12 million people -- don't know where their next meal will come from, according to the U.N. World Food Program.

With no sign of a full-scale withdrawal of international sanctions and continuing caution among potential overseas investors, the honeymoon period for the country's new rulers could be short-lived.

Qaboun, just a stone's throw away from the city center, and other eastern Damascus neighborhoods became rebel strongholds in 2012, when the country's mass protests against Assad spiraled into all-out war.

It suffered government airstrikes and artillery fire, and at one point Islamic State group extremists. In 2017, government forces reclaimed the neighborhood, but when al-Baghdadi tried to return in 2020, security forces kicked him out and forced him to sign a pledge to never return, saying it was a security zone that was off limits.

After Assad's fall, al-Baghdadi was finally able to return. Like many, he was euphoric and hoped it would pave the way for better times despite the many challenges that lay ahead, including rampant power cuts and fuel shortages.

For years, Syrian families have relied on humanitarian aid and remittances from family members living abroad to survive. On top of the gargantuan costs of rebuilding the country's destroyed electricity, water and road infrastructure, money is needed to restore its battered agriculture and industrial sectors to make its hobbled economy productive again.

The United Nations in 2017 estimated that it would cost at least \$250 billion to rebuild Syria. Some experts now say that number could reach at least \$400 billion.

Wealthy Gulf countries have pledged to build economic partnerships with Syria's new interim rulers, while Washington has eased some restrictions without fully lifting its sanctions. The U.S. Treasury Department issued a six-month license authorizing some transactions with Syria's interim government. While it includes some energy sales, Syrians say it isn't enough.

Sinan Hatahet, an economic researcher at the Washington-based Atlantic Council think tank, said the U.S. actions were the "bare minimum" needed to show good faith to Damascus and aren't enough to help Syria jumpstart its economy.

"It doesn't help the private sector to engage," Hatahet said. "The restrictions on trade, the restrictions on reconstruction, on rebuilding the infrastructure are still there."

While countries are hesitant to make more impactful decisions as they hope for a peaceful political transition, many Syrians say the economy can't wait.

"Without jobs, without huge flows of money and investments ... these families have no way of making ends meet," Hatahet said.

The executive director of the World Food Program echoed similar sentiments, warning Syria's neighbors that its food and economic crisis is also a crisis of security.

"Hunger does not breed good will," Cindy McCain said in an interview during her first visit to Damascus.

In the Syrian capital's bustling old marketplace, crowds of people pack the narrow passageways as the country's new de facto flag is draped over the crowded stalls. Merchants say the atmosphere is pleasant and celebratory, but nobody is buying anything.

People stop to smell the aromatic and colorful spices or pose for photos next to masked fighters from the ruling Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group guarding the market's entrances.

"We're very happy with our liberation, thank God, but there are few jobs," said Walid Naoura, who works with his father at a clothing shop. "Yes, we've been relieved of thuggery and oppression, but all these people here have come to celebrate but not to buy anything because things are expensive."

Nearby, Abou Samir, a carpenter, saws a piece of wood as he assembles a chest of drawers. There is no electricity to power his machinery, so he's doing it by hand.

"I'm working at a loss ... and you can't make larger workshops work because there is no electricity," he said.

His sons live abroad and send money to help him get by, but he refuses to stop his carpentry work which

has been his livelihood for 50 years.

In Qaboun, al-Baghdadi sips tea on a makeshift porch overlooking his neighborhood, which has turned into empty plots and a gathering point for local buses and minivans. It was a successful day because he managed to connect an electric cable to power a single light bulb — but part of his roof collapsed.

He still hasn't been able to secure running water but hopes that he and his family can move into the house with its many memories before summer, even if it is far from completion because of his financial situation. "I prefer that to living in a palace elsewhere," al-Baghdadi said.

After 80 years, not many Auschwitz survivors are left. One man makes telling the stories his mission

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

HAIFA, Israel (AP) — Naftali Fürst will never forget his first view of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, on Nov. 3, 1944. He was 12 years old.

SS soldiers threw open the doors of the cattle car, where he was crammed in with his mother, father, brother, and more than 80 others. He remembers the tall chimneys of the crematoria, flames roaring from the top.

There were dogs and officers yelling in German "get out, get out!" forcing people to jump onto the infamous ramp where Nazi doctor Josef Mengele separated children from parents.

Fürst, now 92, is one of a dwindling number of Holocaust survivors able to share first-person accounts of the horrors they endured, as the world marks the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazis' most notorious death camp. Fürst is returning to Auschwitz for the annual occasion, his fourth trip to the camp.

Each time he returns, he thinks of those first moments there.

"We knew we were going to certain death," he said from his home in Haifa, northern Israel, earlier this month. "In Slovakia, we knew that people who went to Poland didn't return."

Strokes of luck

Fürst and his family arrived at the entrance to Auschwitz on Nov. 3, 1943 — one day after Nazi leader Heinrich Himmler ordered the cessation of the use of the gas chambers ahead of their demolition, as the Soviet troops neared. The order meant that his family wasn't immediately killed. It was one of many small bits of luck and coincidences that allowed Fürst to survive.

"For 60 years, I didn't talk about the Holocaust, for 60 years I didn't speak a word of German even though it's my mother tongue," said Fürst.

In 2005, he was invited to attend the ceremony to mark the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Buchenwald, where he was liberated on April 11, 1944, after being moved there from Auschwitz. He realized there were fewer and fewer Holocaust survivors who could give first-person accounts, and decided to throw himself into memorial work. This will be his fourth trip to a ceremony at Auschwitz, having also met Pope Francis there in 2016.

Some 6 million European Jews were killed by the Nazis during the Holocaust — the mass murder of Jews and other groups before and during World War II. Soviet Red Army troops liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau on Jan. 27, 1945, and the day has become known as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. An estimated 1.1 million people, mostly Jews, were killed in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Just 220,000 Holocaust survivors are still alive, according to the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, and more than 20 percent are over 90.

A meeting place after the war

Fürst, originally from Bratislava, then part of Czechoslovakia, was just 6 when the Nazis first started implementing measures against the country's Jews.

He spent ages 9 to 12 in four different concentration camps, including Auschwitz. His parents had planned to jump off of the cattle car on the way to the camp, but people were packed so tightly they couldn't reach the doors.

His father instructed the entire family, no matter what, to meet at 11 Šulekova Street in Bratislava after

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the war. Fürst and his brother were separated from their mother. After numbers were tattooed on their arms, they also were taken from their father. They lived in Block 29, without many other children. As the Soviet army closed in on the area, so close they could hear the booms from the tanks, Fürst and his brother, Shmuel, were forced to join a dangerous journey toward Buchenwald, marching for three days in the cold and snow. Anyone who lagged behind was shot.

"We had to prove our desire to live, to do another step and another step and keep going," he said. Many people gave up, longing to end the hunger and thirst and cold, and just sat down, where they were shot by the guards.

"We had this command from my father: 'You must adapt and survive, and even if you're suffering, you must come back,'" Fürst recalled.

Fürst and his brother survived the march, and an open-car train ride in the snow, but they were separated at the next camp. When Fürst was liberated from Buchenwald, captured in a famous photo that included Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel in the bunkbeds, he was sure he was alone in the world.

But within months, just as Fürst's father had instructed, the four family members reunited at the address they memorized, the home of family friends. The rest of their family – grandparents, aunts, uncles, were all killed. His family later moved to Israel, where he married, had a daughter, four grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren, with another on the way.

'We couldn't imagine this tragedy'

On Oct. 7, 2023, Fürst awoke to the Hamas attack on southern Israel, and immediately thought of his granddaughter, Mika Peleg, and her husband, and their 2-year-old son, who live in Kfar Aza, a kibbutz on the border with Gaza where scores of people were killed or kidnapped.

No one in the family could get in touch with the family.

"It just kept getting worse all day, we couldn't get any information what was happening with them," said Fürst. "We saw the horrors, that we couldn't imagine this type of horror is happening in 2023, 80 years after the Holocaust."

Toward midnight on Oct. 7, Peleg's neighbors sent word that the family had survived. They spent almost 20 hours locked inside their safe room with no food or ability to communicate. Her husband's parents, who both lived on Kfar Aza, were killed.

Despite his close connection, comparisons between Oct. 7 and the Holocaust make Fürst uncomfortable.

"It's awful and terrible and a catastrophe, and hard to describe, but it's not a Holocaust," he said. As awful as the Hamas attack was for his granddaughter and others, the Holocaust was a multi-year "death industry" with massive infrastructure and camps that could kill 10,000 people a day for months at a time, he said.

Fürst, who was previously involved in coexistence work between Jews and Arabs, said his heart also goes out to Palestinians in Gaza, although he believes Israel needed to respond militarily. "I feel the pain of everyone who is suffering, everywhere in the world, because I think I know what suffering is," he said.

Fürst knows that he is one of very few Holocaust survivors still able to travel to Auschwitz, so it's important for him to be present there to mark the 80th anniversary.

These days, he is telling his story as many times as he can, taking part in documentaries and movies, serving as the president of the Buchenwald Prisoner's Association and working to create a memorial statue at the Sered' concentration camp in Slovakia.

He feels a responsibility to be the mouthpiece for the millions who were killed, and people can relate to the story of a single person more than the hard numbers of 6 million deaths, he said.

"Whenever I finish, I tell the youth, the fact that you were able to see living testimony (from a Holocaust survivor) puts a requirement on you more than someone who did not: you take it on your shoulders the obligation to continue to tell this."

Trump to visit disaster zones in North Carolina and California on first trip of second term

By WILL WEISSERT and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is heading to hurricane-battered western North Carolina and wildfire-ravaged Los Angeles on Friday, using the first trip of his second administration to tour areas where politics has clouded the response to deadly disasters.

The Republican president has criticized former President Joe Biden for his administration's response in North Carolina, and he's showered disdain on California leaders for water policies that he falsely claimed worsened the recent blazes.

Trump is also considering overhauling the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Some of his conservative allies have proposed reducing how much the agency reimburses states for handling floods, hurricanes, tornadoes and other calamities.

The White House has asked California congressional members, including Democrats, to hold a roundtable at an airplane hanger in Santa Monica during Trump's visit, according to a person briefed on the plans who demanded anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss them.

Any meeting could be contentious. Trump has suggested using federal disaster assistance as a bargaining chip during unrelated legislative negotiations over government borrowing, or as leverage to persuade California to change its water policies.

"Southern California and California has always been there for other regions of the country in their time of crisis, and we expect our country to be there for us," Sen. Alex Padilla, a Democrat from the state, said this week.

Trump has a history of injecting politics and falsehoods into disaster response. During his first term, he talked about limiting help for Democratic states that didn't support him, according to former administration officials. While running for president last year, he claimed without evidence that Democrats were "going out of their way to not help people in Republican areas" of the battleground state of North Carolina.

More recently, he's falsely insisted that California water policies, specifically fish conservation efforts in the northern part of the state, contributed to hydrants running dry in the Los Angeles area.

"I don't think we should give California anything until they let the water run down," Trump said in an interview with Fox News Channel's Sean Hannity on Wednesday.

The president also suggested shifting more responsibility to individual states for managing disasters.

"I'd rather see the states take care of their own problems," he told Hannity, adding that "FEMA is getting in the way of everything."

Michael Coen, who served as chief of staff at FEMA during the Biden administration, said Trump was "misinformed" about an agency that provides critical help to states when they're overwhelmed by catastrophe.

In addition, Coen criticized the idea of attaching strings to assistance.

"You're going to pick winners and losers on which communities are going to be supported by the federal government," he said. "I think the American people expect the federal government will be there for them on their worst day, no matter where they live."

The last time Trump was president, he visited numerous disaster zones, including the aftermaths of hurricanes and tornados. But he also often sparked controversy, like when he tossed paper towels to survivors of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico.

"If you're a disaster survivor, no matter who you voted for, it's always good when the president comes to town," said Pete Gaynor, who headed FEMA during the first Trump administration between 2019 and 2021. "You can see him and hopefully talk to him about what you need in your community."

Laurie Carpenter, a 62-year-old retiree in Newland, North Carolina, said she's looking forward to Trump visiting because she's been disappointed by the federal response. She said there's still debris and trash strewn around her part of the state months after Hurricane Helene.

"If anybody's going to do something about it, I think he will," Carpenter said.

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Trump tapped Cameron Hamilton, a former Navy SEAL with limited experience managing natural disasters, as FEMA's acting director. He also said that individual states should be in charge of directing response to natural disasters rather than FEMA, and that the federal government should only step in subsequently to provide funding.

Biden vowed before leaving office that the federal government would cover all the costs of responding to the wildfires around Los Angeles, which could end up being the costliest natural disasters in U.S. history. However, that promise won't be kept unless Congress comes up with more funding.

Friday's trip could prompt some uncomfortable conversations about climate change, which Trump has played down and denied. Both Hurricane Helene and the Los Angeles wildfires were exacerbated by global warming.

In Helene's case, a study by international climate scientists at World Weather Attribution found that climate change boosted the storm's rainfall by 10%. In California, the state suffered a record dry fall and winter — its traditional wet season — which made the area around Los Angeles more vulnerable to blazes.

"This is just breaking our comfort zone of what is supposed to be normal," said University of Oregon researcher Amanda Stasiewicz.

After visiting North Carolina and California, Trump plans to hold a Saturday rally in Las Vegas. Advisers said he will offer details on keeping a campaign promise to exclude tips from federal taxes, while reveling in having won Nevada in an Election Day upset.

"I'm going to go to Nevada to thank them," Trump said. He was the first Republican candidate to win the state since 2004, when George W. Bush beat John Kerry.

Las Vegas' 24-hour economy is fueled by the hospitality and service industries, where everyone from restaurant waiters to valet parkers to hotel maids relies on gratuities. However, exempting them from taxes would likely be difficult to implement and require an act of Congress to remain permanent. _____

Associated Press writers Stephen Groves, Seth Borenstein and Makiya Seminera contributed to this report.

Asylum-seekers pushed to new extremes in Mexico after Trump's border crackdown begins

By MEGAN JANETSKY and EDGAR H. CLEMENTE Associated Press

ATOTONILCO DE TULA, Mexico (AP) — When Dayana Castro heard that the U.S. asylum appointment she waited over a year for was canceled in an instant, she had no doubt: She was heading north any way she could.

The 25-year-old migrant, her husband and their 4- and 7-year-old children had nothing left at home in Venezuela. They already had trekked the perilous Darien Gap jungle dividing Colombia and Panama and criminal groups that prey on migrants like them.

Castro was one of tens of thousands of migrants across Mexico with appointments to apply for U.S. asylum at the border scheduled out through February until President Donald Trump took office and issued a series of executive orders to beef up border security and slash migration. One ended the use of the CBP One app that had allowed nearly 1 million people, many seeking asylum, to legally enter the U.S. since January 2023.

"We're going to keep going. We can't go home after all we've been through, after all the countries we've fought our way through, only to give up now," she said from a small shelter in central Mexico beside a freight train line they were riding north.

Now, migrants like her are adjusting to a new and uncertain reality. Many remain determined to reach the U.S. through more dangerous means, riding freight trains, hiring smugglers and dodging authorities. Some lined up in Mexico's refugee offices to seek asylum in that country, while others contemplated finding a way back home.

Trump on Monday declared a national emergency at the U.S.-Mexico border and announced plans to send U.S. troops and restrict refugees and asylum, saying he wants to halt illegal entry and border crime. The measures follow a drop in illegal crossings in recent months.

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Supporters of the CBP One app that people like Castro used to try to enter legally say it brought order to a chaotic border. Critics say it was magnet for more people to come.

Adam Isacson, defense oversight analyst for the human rights organization Washington Office on Latin America, said Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration will surely deter migrants in the short term but will also have cascading humanitarian consequences.

People with valid asylum claims may die in their own countries, he said, while migrants fleeing countries like Venezuela, Cuba and Haiti who cannot easily return home may end up floating around the Americas "completely unprotected." Isacson and other analysts expect Trump's policies will lead to increased demand for smugglers and push migrants — many of whom are children and families — to more dangerous terrain to avoid capture.

By Tuesday, Castro was wrapping her mind around the fact that continuing on after her Feb. 18 appointment with U.S. authorities was canceled would likely mean putting her life, and the lives of her family, at risk as cartels are increasingly extorting and kidnapping vulnerable migrants.

"There's the train, the cartels, migration police, and they all make you pay them," she said as she fed her children bread beside a small shelter where they slept. "But if we don't put ourselves at risk, we'll never arrive."

Along Mexico's southern border with Guatemala another group of migrants in Tapachula took a different approach.

Cuban migrant Rosalí Martínez waited in line outside the Mexican Commission for Refugee Aid in the sweltering southern city. Traveling with her child, she had hoped to reunite with her husband in the U.S.

Now, she was biding her time, joining an increasing number of migrants who have sought asylum in Mexico in recent years, either temporarily due to shifting American restrictions or more permanently.

Like many Cubans in recent years, Martínez was fleeing a spiraling economic crisis.

"I'm going to stay here and see what happens," she said. But "I'm not going back to Cuba. I'll become a Mexican citizen, but there's no way I'm going back to Cuba."

Others like 42-year-old Jomaris Figuera and her husband want to throw in the towel after years trying to build a life outside Venezuela, where economic and political crises have prompted nearly 8 million people to flee in recent years.

They spent more than four years picking coffee in neighboring Colombia, but struggling to make ends meet, they decided to traverse the Darien Gap. They waited nearly a year and a half for a legal pathway to the U.S. in a wooden shelter in a crime-riddled migrant camp in the center of Mexico City.

But due to Venezuela's crises, they have no passports. And without money, they fear their only pathway back will be traveling south through Mexico and Central America, and walking days through the same rugged mountains of the Darien Gap.

Anything would be better than staying in Mexico, said Figuera.

"It's like abandoning everything after everything that's happened to us," she said. "But after trying to get an appointment, and this happens, we've given up."

What to know about the ruling blocking Trump's order on birthright citizenship

By GENE JOHNSON and MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — President Donald Trump's executive order denying U.S. citizenship to the children of parents living in the country illegally faced the first of what will be many legal tests on Thursday. It didn't fare well.

A Justice Department lawyer had barely started making his arguments in a Seattle courtroom when U.S. District Judge John C. Coughenour began blistering him with questions, calling the executive order "blatantly unconstitutional." Coughenour went on to temporarily block it pending further arguments.

Here are some things to know about the decision and the lawsuits challenging Trump's order.

What is birthright citizenship?

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Birthright citizenship is the principle that someone born in a country is a citizen of that country. In the United States, it's enshrined in the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, which states: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside." It was ratified in 1868 to ensure the citizenship of former slaves after the Civil War.

Critics of unfettered immigration have argued that provides an incentive for people to come to, or remain in, the U.S. illegally: They know that if they have children in the U.S., those children will be citizens, who might later petition for them to become legal permanent residents.

In an effort to curb unlawful immigration, Trump issued the executive order just after being sworn in for his second term on Monday. Trump's order drew immediate legal challenges across the country, with at least five lawsuits being brought by 22 states and a number of immigrants rights groups. A lawsuit brought by Washington, Arizona, Oregon and Illinois was the first to get a hearing.

What's next for the legal challenges?

The judge's ruling Thursday was a temporary restraining order. It blocked the administration from enforcing or implementing Trump's order nationally for the next 14 days. Over the next two weeks, the sides will submit further briefings on the legal merits of the executive order. Coughenour scheduled another hearing Feb. 6 to hear arguments on whether to issue a preliminary injunction, which would block the executive order long term while the case proceeds.

In the meantime, some of the other cases challenging the order are also getting underway.

The next hearing is in a case brought in Maryland by CASA, a nonprofit that supports children who have been abused or neglected in foster care. That's set for Feb. 5 at U.S. District Court in Greenbelt.

Another lawsuit, led by New Jersey on behalf of 18 states, the District of Columbia and San Francisco, and a challenge brought in Massachusetts by the Brazilian Worker Center do not yet have hearings scheduled.

Aside from arguing the executive order's constitutionality, the states say the order would subject all the children affected by it to deportation and make many of them stateless. It would strip them of their rights and render them unable to participate in economic or civic life, the states argue.

Why did the judge block Trump's order?

Coughenour did not detail his reasoning during Thursday's hearing, but his assertion that the order is "blatantly unconstitutional," as well as point-blank questioning of DOJ attorney Brett Shumate — and his lack of questions for Washington's assistant attorney general, Lane Polozola — suggested he agreed with the states' arguments.

The states say it's well-settled that the 14th Amendment guarantees birthright citizenship and that the president lacks authority to determine who should or should not be granted U.S. citizenship at birth.

"I've been on the bench for over four decades. I can't remember another case where the question presented was as clear as this one is," Coughenour told Shumate.

The Department of Justice later said in a statement that it will "vigorously defend" the president's executive order.

"We look forward to presenting a full merits argument to the Court and to the American people, who are desperate to see our Nation's laws enforced," the department said.

Who is the judge?

Coughenour, 84, got his law degree from the University of Iowa in 1966 and was appointed to the bench by President Ronald Reagan in 1981. He's been a federal judge for more than four decades; he has taken semi-retired "senior status" but continues hearing cases. He has a reputation as a tough, independent and sometimes cantankerous jurist.

Newly elected Washington Attorney General Nick Brown — a former Seattle U.S. attorney — said after Thursday's hearing that he wasn't surprised by Coughenour's reaction to the "absurdity" of the executive order.

"I've been in front of Judge Coughenour before to see his frustration personally," Brown said. "But I think the words that he expressed, and the seriousness that he expressed, really just drove home what

we have been saying. ... This is fairly obvious.”

Among the thousands of cases Coughenour has handled, covering everything from criminal to environmental law, probably the most famous was that of “millennium bomber” Ahmed Ressam. Ressam was arrested entering the U.S. in December 1999 with a trunk full of explosives and plans to bomb Los Angeles International Airport on New Year’s Eve.

Coughenour repeatedly butted heads with federal prosecutors during Ressam’s sentencing, disagreeing about how much credit Ressam should receive for cooperating with them after his conviction. Twice Coughenour sentenced Ressam to 22 years — far less than prosecutors were seeking — and twice the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned him.

Coughenour finally sentenced Ressam to 37 years in 2012. At the time, he said Ressam’s case was the only one he could think of in which the appeals court deemed him too lenient.

Progress is made on a huge fire north of Los Angeles while new fires erupt in Southern California

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Evacuation orders were lifted Thursday for tens of thousands as firefighters with air support slowed the spread of a huge wildfire churning through rugged mountains north of Los Angeles, but new blazes erupted in San Diego County, briefly triggering more evacuations.

Southern California is under a red flag warning for critical fire risk through Friday. The area has been facing constant challenges in controlling the fires, as dangerous winds gained strength again Thursday.

The Hughes Fire broke out late Wednesday morning and in less than a day 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.

Crews made significant progress by late afternoon on the Hughes Fire, with more than one-third of it contained.

Two new blazes were reported Thursday in the San Diego area. Evacuations were ordered but were later lifted after a brush fire erupted in the late afternoon in the wealthy enclave of La Jolla near the University of California, San Diego, School of Medicine. Further south, near the U.S.-Mexico border, another blaze was quickly spreading through the Otay Mountain Wilderness, home to the endangered Quino checkerspot butterfly and other unique species.

In Ventura County, a new fire briefly prompted the evacuation of California State University Channel Islands in Camarillo. Water-dropping helicopters made quick progress against the Laguna Fire that erupted in hills above the campus of about 7,000 students. The evacuation order was later downgraded to a warning.

Rain is forecast for the weekend, potentially ending Southern California’s monthslong dry spell. Winds are also not as strong as they were when the Palisades and Eaton fires broke out, allowing for firefighting aircraft to dump tens of thousands of gallons of fire retardant.

That helped the fight against the Hughes Fire in the Castaic area north of Los Angeles, allowing helicopters to drop water, which kept it from growing, fire spokesperson Jeremy Ruiz said.

“We had helicopters dropping water until around 3 a.m. That kept it in check,” he said.

Nearly 54,000 residents in the Castaic area were still under evacuation warnings Thursday, the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department said. There were no reports of homes or other structures burned.

Kayla Amara drove to Castaic’s Stonegate neighborhood Wednesday 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.

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.

The Palisades Fire was more than three-quarters contained, and the Eaton Fire was 95% under control

Thursday. The two fires have killed at least 28 people and destroyed more than 14,000 structures since they broke out Jan. 7.

Rain was expected to start Saturday, according to the National Weather Service. Officials welcomed the wet weather, but crews also were shoring up hillsides and installing barriers to prevent debris flows as residents returned to the charred Pacific Palisades and Altadena areas.

The California fires have overall caused at least \$28 billion in insured damage and probably a little more in uninsured damage, according to Karen Clark and Company, a disaster modeling firm known for accurate post-catastrophe damage assessments.

On the heels of that assessment, California Republicans are pushing back against suggestions by President Donald Trump, House Speaker Mike Johnson and others that federal disaster aid for victims of wildfires should come with strings attached.

The state Legislature approved a more than \$2.5 billion fire relief package Thursday, in part to help the Los Angeles area recover from the fires.

Trump plans to travel to the state to see the damage firsthand Friday, but it isn't clear whether he and Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom will meet during the visit.

Recording captured ex-interpreter impersonating Ohtani to transfer \$200,000, prosecutors say

By HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

A nearly four-minute audio recording allegedly captured Shohei Ohtani's former interpreter Ipppei Mizuhara impersonating the baseball star on a call with a bank as he attempted to transfer \$200,000 for what he describes as a car loan, federal prosecutors said Thursday.

The recording referenced in a court filing and obtained by The Associated Press is being used to back up prosecutors' push for a nearly five-year sentence for Mizuhara, who previously pleaded guilty to bank and tax fraud for stealing almost \$17 million from the Los Angeles Dodgers star.

Prosecutors are also seeking restitution of the nearly \$17 million to Ohtani, as well as a penalty of more than \$1 million to the IRS.

Mizuhara is due to be sentenced Feb. 6 after pleading guilty to one count of bank fraud and one count of subscribing to a false tax return.

His attorney, Michael G. Freedman, did not respond to an email from The Associated Press requesting comment.

In the recording, a man is heard identifying himself as Ohtani and saying that he tried to log into online banking but it wasn't available. He later confirms that the transaction amount is \$200,000.

When the woman from the bank asks him the reason for the transaction, he says it's for a car loan.

"What is your relationship to the payee?" she asks.

"Um, he's my friend," the man responds.

The recording was obtained from the bank, according to Assistant U.S. Attorney Jeff Mitchell. It's unclear when it was made.

Towards the end of the call, the woman from the bank asks, "Will there be any future wires to your friend?"

"Possibly," the man says.

The recording was first obtained by The Athletic.

The legal filing says Mizuhara accessed Ohtani's account beginning around November 2021 and changed its security protocols so he could impersonate him to authorize wire transfers. By 2024, Mizuhara allegedly had used that money to buy about \$325,000 worth of baseball cards at online resellers eBay and Whatnot.

Mizuhara pleaded guilty in June to spending millions from Ohtani's Arizona bank account to cover his growing gambling bets and debts with an illegal bookmaker, as well as medical bills and the \$325,000 worth of baseball cards.

Mizuhara was there for many of the Japanese sensation's career highlights: He was Ohtani's catcher

during the Home Run Derby at the 2021 All-Star Game and was also present for his two American League MVP wins and record-shattering \$700 million, 10-year deal with the Dodgers. Off the field, he became Ohtani's friend and confidant.

Mizuhara famously resigned from the Los Angeles Angels during the 2021 MLB lockout so he could keep speaking to Ohtani — he was rehired after a deal was struck — and their wives reportedly socialized.

But he gambled it all away, betting tens of millions of dollars that weren't his to wager on international soccer, the NBA, the NFL and college football — though prosecutors said he never bet on baseball.

Woman indicted in car crash that killed Vikings rookie Khyree Jackson and 2 others

UPPER MARLBORO, Md. (AP) — A woman was indicted Thursday in the July 6 car crash that killed Minnesota Vikings rookie cornerback Khyree Jackson and two of his former high school teammates.

Cori Clingman was indicted on 13 counts, including vehicular manslaughter related to driving under the influence, according to prosecutors in Prince George's County, a Washington suburb.

Clingman faces up to 30 years in prison if convicted, State's Attorney Aisha Braveboy said.

"This just starts really our fight to get justice for these three young men, their families, Wise High School, the NFL, and this entire community," Braveboy said.

It wasn't immediately clear whether Clingman had an attorney. Braveboy said Clingman was arrested without incident and would have a bond review on Friday.

Jackson was a fourth-round draft pick by the Vikings in April. He played two years at Alabama before finishing his college career with one season at Oregon.

Jackson, 24, and Isaiah Hazel died at the scene of the three-car crash, while Anthony Lytton Jr. died at a hospital. Lytton was 24 and Hazel was 23.

The three were in the same vehicle just after 3 a.m. when it was struck by another vehicle that was speeding and changing lanes, police said.

"We believe that there was contact made between Ms. Clingman's vehicle and the victims' vehicle," Braveboy said.

Hazel was driving and Jackson and Lytton were passengers. Their car veered off the road after being hit and struck multiple tree stumps.

Nobody was injured in the second or third vehicles.

Hazel played college football at Maryland and Charlotte, and Lytton played at Florida State and Penn State. The three won a state championship together at Maryland's Dr. Henry A. Wise Jr. High School.

Trump orders release of JFK, RFK and MLK assassination records

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — President Donald Trump has ordered the release of thousands of classified governmental documents about the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy, which has fueled conspiracy theories for decades.

The executive order Trump signed Thursday also aims to declassify the remaining federal records relating to the assassinations of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. The order is among a flurry of executive actions Trump has quickly taken the first week of his second term.

Speaking to reporters, Trump said, "everything will be revealed."

Trump had promised during his reelection campaign to make public the last batches of still-classified documents surrounding President Kennedy's assassination in Dallas, which has transfixed people for decades. Trump made a similar pledge during his first term, but ultimately bent to appeals from the CIA and FBI to withhold some documents.

Trump has nominated Kennedy's nephew, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., to be the health secretary in his new administration. Kennedy's father, Robert F. Kennedy, was assassinated in 1968 as he sought the Democratic

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presidential nomination. The younger Kennedy has said he isn't convinced that a lone gunman was solely responsible for the assassination of his uncle, President Kennedy, in 1963.

The order directs the director of national intelligence and the attorney general to develop a plan within 15 days to release the remaining John F. Kennedy records, and within 45 days for the other two cases. It was not clear when the records would actually be released.

Trump handed the pen used to sign the order to an aide and directed it to be given to Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Only a few thousand of the millions of governmental records related to the assassination of President Kennedy have yet to be fully declassified. And while many who have studied what's been released so far say the public shouldn't anticipate any earth-shattering revelations, there is still an intense interest in details related to the assassination and the events surrounding it.

"There's always the possibility that something would slip through that would be the tiny tip of a much larger iceberg that would be revealing," said Larry J. Sabato, director of the University of Virginia Center for Politics and author of "The Kennedy Half-Century." "That's what researchers look for. Now, odds are you won't find that but it is possible that it's there."

Kennedy was fatally shot in downtown Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, as his motorcade passed in front of the Texas School Book Depository building, where 24-year-old assassin Lee Harvey Oswald had positioned himself from a sniper's perch on the sixth floor. Two days after Kennedy was killed, nightclub owner Jack Ruby fatally shot Oswald during a jail transfer.

In the early 1990s, the federal government mandated that all assassination-related documents be housed in a single collection in the National Archives and Records Administration. The collection of over 5 million records was required to be opened by 2017, barring any exemptions designated by the president.

The order notes that although no congressional act directs the release of information on the assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy or King, those governmental records being made public "is also in the public interest."

During his first term, Trump boasted that he'd allow the release of all of the remaining records on the president's assassination but ended up holding some back because of what he called the potential harm to national security. And while files have continued to be released under President Joe Biden, some still remain unseen.

Sabato, who trains student researchers to comb through the documents, said that most researchers agree that "roughly" 3,000 records have not yet been released, either in whole or in part, and many of those originated with the CIA.

The documents released over the last several years offer details on the way intelligence services operated at the time, and include CIA cables and memos discussing visits by Oswald to the Soviet and Cuban embassies during a trip to Mexico City just weeks before the assassination. The former Marine had previously defected to the Soviet Union before returning home to Texas.

King and Robert F. Kennedy were assassinated within two months of each other in 1968.

King was outside a motel in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4, 1968, when shots rang out. The civil rights leader, who had been in town to support striking sanitation workers, was set to lead marches and other nonviolent protests there. He died at a hospital less than an hour later.

James Earl Ray pleaded guilty to assassinating King. He later though renounced that plea and maintained his innocence up until his death.

FBI documents released over the years show how the bureau wiretapped King's telephone lines, bugged his hotel rooms and used informants to get information against him. The agency's conduct was the subject of the recent documentary film, "MLK/FBI."

Robert F. Kennedy, then a New York senator, was fatally shot on June 5, 1968, at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles moments after giving his victory speech for winning California's Democratic presidential primary. His assassin, Sirhan Sirhan, was convicted of first-degree murder and is serving life in prison.

There are still some documents in the JFK collection though that researchers don't believe the president

will be able to release. Around 500 documents, including tax returns, weren't subject to the 2017 disclosure requirement. And, researchers note, documents have also been destroyed over the decades.

A\$AP Rocky assault trial heads to opening statements as a jury is seated

By ANDREW DALTON Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A jury of five men and seven women was seated Thursday for the trial of rapper A\$AP Rocky, who is charged with firing a gun at a former friend in 2021.

Opening statements at the Los Angeles trial of the 36-year-old hip-hop superstar and fashion maven will begin Friday after the 12 jurors and four alternates are sworn in.

Rocky turned down a prosecution plea offer of 180 days in jail to risk years in prison if the jurors find him guilty of two felony counts of assault with a semiautomatic firearm. He has pleaded not guilty and his lawyer says he committed no crime.

He opted instead to risk trial on two counts of assault with a semiautomatic firearm, charges that with conviction bring a penalty of up to 24 years in prison.

It took the two sides 2 1/2 days to pick the jurors from a pool of more than a hundred candidates who packed into a downtown LA courtroom. Those chosen include a woman who is a podcast editor and actor, and a man who has worked for more than 20 years at Trader Joe's. The last alternate seated is a retired judge.

Many were excused for cause, others sent away by one of the two sides. Each had 10 jurors they could excuse without a reason. The defense used seven of their challenges, the prosecution just two.

One man questioned Thursday works as a civilian with the Los Angeles Police Department and has extensive ties to law enforcement including a cousin who was on the case's witness list but is not expected to be called.

After the judge declined to dismiss him for cause, Rocky's lawyer Joe Tacopina took him off the jury.

"Here's a shocker, we're going to thank and excuse juror number 27."

Attitudes toward police were a common topic during jury selection. In several heated moments, Superior Court Judge Mark Arnold, a former sheriff's deputy, questioned those who said they mistrusted police, nearly debating with some of them.

He asked one woman, a speech pathologist, whether he should mistrust all speech pathologists based on his bad experience with one.

When another woman brought up police corruption, Arnold demanded she "tell me about the documented corruption at LAPD that you must've either read about or heard."

When she brought up the Rodney King case, he asked, "You are going to hold against current police something that happened before they were born?"

Many questions were about the fame of both Rocky and especially Rihanna, his longtime life partner and the mother of his two toddler children. She was not in court Thursday, and it's not certain whether she will show up during the trial.

"What if Rihanna comes here to court, is it going to be hard for you to look over there, and see the defendant's family, and deliver a guilty verdict?" Deputy District Attorney John Lewin asked one woman.

After a long pause, she said "yes."

Rocky is accused of firing three or four shots at Terrell Ephron, a friend from his teenage years, on the streets of Hollywood in 2021. Ephron said the shots grazed his knuckles. Rocky has pleaded not guilty, and his lawyers say he wasn't even holding a real gun, but a starter pistol he used as a prop.

A federal judge temporarily blocks Trump's executive order redefining birthright citizenship

By GENE JOHNSON and MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — A federal judge on Thursday temporarily blocked President Donald Trump's executive order denying U.S. citizenship to the children of parents living in the country illegally, calling it "blatantly unconstitutional" during the first hearing in a multi-state effort challenging the order.

The 14th Amendment to the Constitution promises citizenship to those born on U.S. soil, a measure ratified in 1868 to ensure citizenship for former slaves after the Civil War. But in an effort to curb unlawful immigration, Trump issued the executive order just after being sworn in for his second term on Monday.

The order would deny citizenship to those born after Feb. 19 whose parents are in the country illegally. It also forbids U.S. agencies from issuing any document or accepting any state document recognizing citizenship for such children.

Trump's order drew immediate legal challenges across the country, with at least five lawsuits being brought by 22 states and a number of immigrants rights groups. A lawsuit brought by Washington, Arizona, Oregon and Illinois was the first to get a hearing.

"I've been on the bench for over four decades. I can't remember another case where the question presented was as clear as this one is," U.S. District Judge John Coughenour told a Justice Department attorney. "This is a blatantly unconstitutional order."

Thursday's decision prevents the Trump administration from taking steps to implement the executive order for 14 days. In the meantime, the parties will submit further arguments about the merits of Trump's order. Coughenour scheduled a hearing on Feb. 6 to decide whether to block it long term as the case proceeds.

Coughenour, 84, a Ronald Reagan appointee who was nominated to the federal bench in 1981, grilled the DOJ attorney, Brett Shumate, asking whether Shumate personally believed the order was constitutional.

"I have difficulty understanding how a member of the bar could state unequivocally that this is a constitutional order," he added.

Shumate assured the judge he did — "absolutely." He said the arguments the Trump administration is making now have never previously been litigated, and that there was no reason to issue a 14-day temporary restraining order when it would expire before the executive order takes effect.

The Department of Justice later said in a statement that it will "vigorously defend" the president's executive order, which it said "correctly interprets the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution."

"We look forward to presenting a full merits argument to the Court and to the American people, who are desperate to see our Nation's laws enforced," the department said.

The U.S. is among about 30 countries where birthright citizenship — the principle of jus soli or "right of the soil" — is applied. Most are in the Americas, and Canada and Mexico are among them.

The 14th Amendment was ratified in 1868, in the aftermath of the Civil War, to ensure citizenship for former slaves and free African Americans. It states: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside."

Trump's order asserts that the children of noncitizens are not "subject to the jurisdiction" of the United States, and therefore not entitled to citizenship.

Arguing for the states on Thursday, Washington assistant attorney general Lane Polozola called that "absurd," noting that neither those who have immigrated illegally nor their children are immune from U.S. law.

"Are they not subject to the decisions of the immigration courts?" Polozola asked. "Must they not follow the law while they are here?"

Polozola also said the restraining order was warranted because, among other reasons, the executive order would immediately start requiring the states to spend millions to revamp health care and benefits systems to reconsider an applicant's citizenship status.

"The executive order will impact hundreds of thousands of citizens nationwide who will lose their citizenship under this new rule," Polozola said. "Births cannot be paused while the court considers this case."

Washington Attorney General Nick Brown told reporters afterward he was not surprised that Coughenour

had little patience with the Justice Department's position, considering that the Citizenship Clause arose from one of the darkest chapters of American law, the Supreme Court's 1857 Dred Scott decision, which held that African Americans, whether enslaved or free, were not entitled to citizenship.

"Babies are being born today, tomorrow, every day, all across this country, and so we had to act now," Brown said. He added that it has been "the law of the land for generations, that you are an American citizen if you are born on American soil, period."

"Nothing that the president can do will change that," he said.

A key case involving birthright citizenship unfolded in 1898. The Supreme Court held that Wong Kim Ark, who was born in San Francisco to Chinese immigrants, was a U.S. citizen because he was born in the country. After a trip abroad, he had faced being denied reentry by the federal government on the grounds that he wasn't a citizen under the Chinese Exclusion Act.

But some advocates of immigration restrictions have argued that case clearly applied to children born to parents who were both legal immigrants. They say it's less clear whether it applies to children born to parents living in the country illegally.

Trump's order prompted attorneys general to share their personal connections to birthright citizenship. Connecticut Attorney General William Tong, for instance, a U.S. citizen by birthright and the nation's first Chinese American elected attorney general, said the lawsuit was personal for him. Later Thursday, he said Coughenour made the right decision.

"There is no legitimate legal debate on this question. But the fact that Trump is dead wrong will not prevent him from inflicting serious harm right now on American families like my own," Tong said this week.

Hegseth told senator he paid \$50,000 to woman who accused him of 2017 sex assault

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pete Hegseth, President Donald Trump's nominee for defense secretary, paid \$50,000 to the woman who accused him of sexual assault in 2017, according to answers he provided to a senator during his confirmation process that The Associated Press has obtained.

The written answers were provided to Massachusetts Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren in response to additional questions she had for Hegseth as part of the vetting process.

His attorney, Timothy Parlatore, declined to comment Thursday on the dollar figure, which was previously unknown. In November, Parlatore confirmed that the settlement payment had been made, and Hegseth told senators during his confirmation hearing last week that he was "falsely accused" and completely cleared.

News of the payment came as the Senate advanced Hegseth's nomination along party lines, with a final vote on his confirmation expected Friday. Democrats — and two Republicans — have raised concerns about Hegseth, who also has faced allegations of excessive drinking and abuse of his second wife, which he denies.

Two days after Hegseth was grilled by senators at this confirmation hearing, Trump's transition team briefed the two leaders of the Senate Armed Services Committee on an additional statement that Hegseth's second wife, Samantha Hegseth, had provided to the FBI.

In the statement that the transition team read Jan. 16 to Mississippi Republican Roger Wicker and Rhode Island Democrat Jack Reed, she said Pete Hegseth had and continues to have a problem with alcohol abuse, a person familiar with the FBI briefing and its findings told The Associated Press.

Reed has called Hegseth's FBI background check substandard. He said in a statement Thursday that he and Wicker received multiple FBI briefings about the defense secretary nominee, something he had not seen in more than 25 years on the Armed Services Committee, and that "the recent reports about the contents of the background briefings on Mr. Hegseth are true and accurate."

Parlatore, Hegseth's attorney, said Thursday that "Reed is knowingly lying" because what Samantha Hegseth actually told the FBI is that Pete Hegseth drinks more often than not, but she also acknowledged that she had not spent time with him for about seven years.

Senators also received an affidavit Tuesday from a former sister-in-law of the Pentagon nominee alleging his repeated drunkenness and that he was abusive to Samantha Hegseth to the point where she feared for her safety. He and his ex-wife have denied that he was abusive, and Parlatore called the affidavit a "clear and admitted partisan attempt to derail Mr. Hegseth's confirmation."

Meanwhile, the \$50,000 payment was made years after the woman told police that Hegseth sexually assaulted her in a California hotel room in 2017 after he took her phone, blocked the door and refused to let her leave, according to an investigative report released in November.

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

The report does not say that police found the allegations were false. Police recommended the case report be forwarded to the Monterey County District Attorney's Office for review.

Monterey County District Attorney Jeannine M. Pacioni said her office declined to file charges in January 2018 because it didn't have "proof beyond a reasonable doubt."

Parlatore has said the payment was made as part of a confidential settlement a few years after the police investigation because Hegseth was concerned that she was prepared to sue and that could have gotten him fired from Fox News, where he was a popular host.

Italy's top court upholds Amanda Knox's conviction for falsely accusing innocent man of murder

By NICOLE WINFIELD and COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Italy's highest court on Thursday confirmed a slander conviction against U.S. defendant Amanda Knox for accusing an innocent man of murdering her British flatmate 17 years ago in a sensational case that polarized trial watchers on both sides of the Atlantic.

Knox had appealed the conviction based on a European Court of Human Rights ruling that said her rights had been violated by police failure to provide a lawyer and adequate translator during a long night of questioning just days after 21-year-old Meredith Kercher's murder in the university town of Perugia.

Judge Monica Boni read the verdict aloud in a courtroom that was empty except for a few reporters and guards. The lawyers for both Knox and the man she wrongly accused, Patrick Lumumba, had gone home during deliberations.

The ruling seemingly ends a 17-year legal saga that saw Knox and her Italian ex-boyfriend convicted and acquitted in flip-flop verdicts in Kercher's brutal murder, before being exonerated by the highest Cassation Court in 2015.

The slander conviction against Knox had survived multiple appeals, and Knox was reconvicted on the charge in June after the European court ruling cleared the way for a new trial.

Reached by telephone, Lumumba said he was satisfied with the verdict. "Amanda was wrong. This verdict has to accompany her for the rest of her life," he said.

Knox's lawyer, Carlo Dalla Vedova, expressed surprise at the court's decision. "We are incredulous," Dalla Vedova told reporters in the courthouse by phone. "This is totally unexpected in our eyes, and totally unjust for Amanda."

Knox called it a "surreal" day in a post on X.

"I've just been found guilty yet again of a crime I didn't commit," her post said. "And I was just awarded the Innocence Network Impact Award, created to honor an exonerated person who raises awareness of wrongful convictions, policy issues, or assists others post-release."

Speaking recently on her "Labyrinths" podcast, Knox said: "I hate the fact that I have to live with consequences for a crime I did not commit." She said consequences included difficulties in obtaining visas to some countries because of a criminal conviction.

Her defense team says she accused Lumumba, a Congolese man who employed her at a bar in the central Italian university town of Perugia, during a long night of questioning and under pressure from police, who they said fed her false information. The European Court of Human Rights found that the police deprived her of a lawyer and provided a translator who acted more as a mediator.

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Knox, now 37, does not risk any more time in jail. She has already served nearly four years during the investigation, initial murder trial and first appeal. But Knox had continued the legal battle with the aim of clearing her name of all criminal wrongdoing.

Knox returned to the United States in 2011, after being freed by an appeals court in Perugia, and has established herself as a global campaigner for the wrongly convicted. She has a podcast with her husband and has a new memoir coming out titled, "Free: My Search for Meaning."

Knox was a 20-year-old student in Perugia when Kercher was found stabbed to death on Nov. 2, 2007, in her bedroom in the apartment they shared with two Italian women.

The case made global headlines as suspicion quickly fell on Knox and her boyfriend of just days, Raffaele Sollecito. But another man, Rudy Hermann Guede, from the Ivory Coast, was eventually convicted of murder after his DNA was found at the crime scene. He was freed in 2021, after serving most of his 16-year sentence.

The European court ordered Italy to pay Knox damages for the police failures, noting she was particularly vulnerable as a foreign student not fluent in Italian.

Italy's high court ordered the new slander trial based on that ruling. It threw out two signed statements drafted by police falsely accusing Lumumba in the murder, and directed the appellate court that the only evidence it could consider was a hand-written letter she later wrote in English attempting to walk back the accusation.

However, the appellate court in its reasoning said that the four-page memo supported a slander finding. On the basis of Knox's statements, Lumumba was brought in for questioning, despite having an ironclad alibi. His business suffered, and he eventually moved to Poland with his Polish wife.

Arriving at court, he underlined that Knox "has never apologized to me."

Stock market today: S&P 500 climbs to a record

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stocks rose to a record Thursday as Wall Street regained some of the momentum that catapulted it to 57 all-time highs last year.

The S&P 500 climbed 0.5% to surpass its record set early last month after coming close the day before. It was the seventh gain in eight days for the main measure of Wall Street's health. The Dow Jones Industrial Average piled on 408 points, or 0.9%, while the Nasdaq composite added 0.2%.

The gains came amid relatively calm moves for Treasury yields in the U.S. bond market. Big swings there in recent months have been shaking the stock market, particularly when rising worries about inflation and the U.S. government's heavy debt send Treasury yields higher.

Treasury yields took a brief turn upward after President Donald Trump began talking about the prospect of tariffs in a speech by video at the World Economic Forum, saying products made outside of the United States will be subject to a tariff, but they pulled back after he gave few details. Crude prices also sank after Trump called on oil-producing countries to reduce the price of crude, which would ease worries about inflation.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury climbed to 4.64% from 4.61% late Wednesday, though it remains below its high from earlier this month. The two-year Treasury yield eased to 4.29% from 4.30% late Wednesday.

Yields earlier in the day had held relatively steady after a report showed slightly more U.S. workers applied for unemployment benefits last week than economists expected. While the numbers increased, "they were well within the modest range established in recent months," according to Chris Larkin, managing director, trading and investing, at E-Trade from Morgan Stanley. "Employment continues to highlight US economic outperformance."

Traders don't expect the report to push the Federal Reserve to cut its main interest rate at its upcoming meeting next week, according to data from CME Group. If they're correct, it would be the first meeting since September where the Fed hasn't lowered the federal funds rate to take pressure off the U.S. economy. Lower rates can goose prices for investments, but they can also give inflation more fuel.

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On Wall Street, GE Aerospace flew 6.6% higher after reporting stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. The company, which split off from General Electric with two other companies last year, said orders for its airplane engines and services jumped 50% from a year earlier to \$12.9 billion.

Netflix was another one of the strongest forces lifting the S&P 500. It rose another 3.2% after jumping 9.7% the day before following a better-than-expected profit report.

Union Pacific chugged 5.2% higher after beating analysts' expectations for profit in the latest quarter. The railroad said its workforce was more productive during the quarter, and its fuel consumption rate likewise improved.

American Airlines lost 8.7% even though it reported stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected. It said it may report a bigger loss for the first three months of 2025 than analysts expected. American also gave a forecasted range for profit over the full year whose midpoint fell short of analysts' expectations.

Video game maker Electronic Arts dropped 16.7% after it warned of a slowdown in revenue related to its soccer game, EA Sports FC25. It also said fewer gamers played its Dragon Age game during the latest quarter than it expected, further cutting into its revenue.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 32.34 points to 6,118.71. The Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 408.34 to 44,565.07, and the Nasdaq composite added 44.34 to 20,053.68.

In stock markets abroad, movements were mostly quiet, even after China's latest attempt to juice stock prices in the world's second-largest economy. Stocks in Hong Kong got a brief boost from China's ordering of pensions and mutual funds to invest more in domestic stocks, for example, but the Hang Seng index ended with a dip of 0.4%.

Japan's Nikkei 225 gained 0.8% despite a sharp drop for Fuji Media Holdings after Masahiro Nakai, a top TV host and former pop star, said he was retiring to take responsibility over sexual assault allegations that are part of a wave roiling Japan's entertainment industry. The Fuji TV scandal triggered an avalanche of lost advertising at one of the networks where he worked.

In the cryptocurrency market, where prices have surged on hopes President Donald Trump will make Washington friendlier to the industry, bitcoin fell below \$103,000, according to CoinDesk. It had set a record above \$109,000 on Monday.

Senate advances Pete Hegseth as Trump's defense secretary, despite allegations

By LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate advanced the nomination of Pete Hegseth as President Donald Trump's defense secretary Thursday on a largely party-line vote, despite grave objections from Democrats and stirring unease among Republicans over his behavior and qualifications to lead the U.S. military.

Two Republicans, Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Sen. Susan Collins of Maine, broke ranks with Trump and his allies who have mounted an extensive public campaign to push Hegseth toward confirmation. The former combat veteran and Fox News host faces allegations of excessive drinking and aggressive actions toward women, which he has denied. The vote was 51-49, with a final vote on confirmation expected Friday.

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer implored his colleagues to think seriously, "Is this the best man we have to lead the greatest military in the world?"

Murkowski, in a lengthy statement, said that his behaviors "starkly contrast" with what is expected of the military.

"I remain concerned about the message that confirming Mr. Hegseth sends to women currently serving and those aspiring to join," Murkowski wrote on social media.

Both Murkowski and Collins noted Hegseth's past statements that women should not fill military combat roles. He sought to temper those statements during the confirmation process.

Collins said that after a lengthy discussion with Hegseth, "I am not convinced that his position on women serving in combat roles has changed."

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Collins said that while she appreciates Hegseth's "courageous military service and his ongoing commitment to our service members and their families, I am concerned that he does not have the experience and perspective necessary to succeed in the job."

Rarely has a Cabinet choice encountered such swirling allegations of wrongdoing. The outcome provides a measure of Trump's power and a test for the Senate as it considers the president's other outsider Cabinet picks, including Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., for Health and Human Services, Kash Patel at the FBI and Tulsi Gabbard for Director of the Office of National Intelligence.

Republican senators, and some Democrats, appear ready to give the president his team. Only Matt Gaetz, the former congressman who was Trump's initial choice for attorney general, was met with enough resistance that his nomination was withdrawn.

The chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee has dismissed the claims against Hegseth as factually inaccurate.

It will take a simple majority of senators to confirm Hegseth's nomination. Most Republicans, who hold a 53-seat majority in the chamber, have signaled they will back the nominee, though Vice President JD Vance could be called in to break a tie vote.

"I am ironclad in my assessment that the nominee, Mr. Hegseth, is prepared to be the next secretary of defense," the chairman, Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., said in a statement on the eve of voting. "The Senate needs to confirm this nominee as fast as possible."

A new president's national security nominees are often the first to be lined up for confirmation, to ensure U.S. safety at home and abroad. Already the Senate has overwhelmingly confirmed Marco Rubio as secretary of state in a unanimous vote, and confirmed John Ratcliffe as CIA director Thursday.

But Hegseth stands in a category of his own amid allegations that he sexually assaulted a woman at a Republican conference in California, which he has denied as a consensual encounter, and of heavy drinking at events when he led a veterans organization.

AP reported Thursday Hegseth paid \$50,000 to the woman who accused him of sexual assault in 2017, according to answers he provided to a senator during his confirmation process.

Separately, a new claim emerged this week in an affidavit from a former sister-in-law who claimed Hegseth was abusive to his second wife to the point that she feared for her safety. Hegseth has denied the allegation. In divorce proceedings, neither Hegseth nor the woman claimed to be a victim of domestic abuse.

Schumer said Thursday that Hegseth is unqualified for the job.

"One of the kindest words that might be used to describe Mr. Hegseth is erratic, and that's a term you don't want at DOD," Schumer said. "He has a clear problem of judgment."

A Princeton and Harvard-educated former combat veteran, Hegseth went on to make a career at Fox News, where he hosted a weekend show. Trump tapped him as the defense secretary to lead an organization with nearly 2.1 million service members, about 780,000 civilians and a budget of \$850 billion.

During a fiery confirmation hearing, Hegseth swatted away allegations of wrongdoing one by one — dismissing them as "smears" — as he displayed his military credentials and vowed to bring "warrior culture" to the top Pentagon post.

Hegseth has promised not to drink on the job if confirmed.

Wicker said he had been briefed a third time on the FBI background investigation into Hegseth. He said "the allegations unfairly impugning his character do not pass scrutiny."

But senators have remained doubtful of his experience and abilities and the alleged behavior that could lead to reprimand or firing for military personnel he would now be expected to lead.

Still, Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, herself a combat veteran and sexual assault survivor, has signaled her backing.

US active duty troops beginning to arrive in Texas and San Diego to support border security

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Active duty military troops will begin arriving in El Paso, Texas, and San Diego on Thursday evening, in what defense officials said is the first batch of the new forces being deployed to secure the southern border.

The Pentagon announced on Wednesday that about 1,500 troops were being sent to the border this week, as the department scrambles to put in motion President Donald Trump's executive order demanding an immediate crackdown on immigration.

U.S. officials said they expect additional troops to be ordered to deploy in the next few days as defense and homeland security leaders iron out requests for more support.

The officials said it's not yet clear how many more service members would get tapped in the near future, but they would include active duty, National Guard and Reserves, and come from land, air and sea forces. Other defense and military officials this week estimated that the additional number deployed could be in the thousands.

The troops announced Wednesday include about 1,000 Army soldiers from a variety of units and 500 Marines from Camp Pendleton in California.

Officials said Thursday that they expect the bulk of them to be in El Paso — including Fort Bliss — or in San Diego by Friday, where they will get their mission assignments and prepare to spread out along the border. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to provide details on troop movements.

There were already about 2,500 Guard and Reserve forces deployed to the border, and the new 1,500 would add to that total. But officials noted that given the length of the nearly 2,000-mile border with Mexico, it will take additional forces to help put large rolls of concertina wire barriers in place and provide needed transportation, intelligence and other support to the Border Patrol.

As of Thursday there were still no requests for the use of military bases to house migrants or for troops to be used for law enforcement duties.

Trump pardons anti-abortion activists who blockaded clinic entrances

By CHRISTINE FERNANDO Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — President Donald Trump announced Thursday he would pardon anti-abortion activists convicted of blockading abortion clinic entrances.

Trump called it "a great honor to sign this."

"They should not have been prosecuted," he said as he signed pardons for "peaceful pro-life protesters."

The people pardoned were involved in the October 2020 invasion and blockade of a Washington clinic. Lauren Handy was sentenced to nearly five years in prison for leading the blockade by directing blockaders to link themselves together with locks and chains to block the clinic's doors. A nurse sprained her ankle when one person pushed her while entering the clinic, and a woman was accosted by another blockader while having labor pains, prosecutors said. Police found five fetuses in Handy's home after she was indicted.

Trump pardoned Handy and her nine co-defendants: Jonathan Darnel of Virginia; Jay Smith, John Hinshaw and William Goodman, all of New York; Joan Bell of New Jersey; Paulette Harlow and Jean Marshall, both of Massachusetts; Heather Idoni of Michigan; and Herb Geraghty of Pennsylvania.

In the first week of Trump's presidency, anti-abortion advocates have ramped up calls for Trump to pardon protesters charged with violating the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, which is designed to protect abortion clinics from obstruction and threats. The 1994 law was passed during a time where clinic protests and blockades were on the rise, as was violence against abortion providers, such as the murder of Dr. David Gunn in 1993.

Trump specifically mentioned Harlow in a June speech criticizing former President Joe Biden's Depart-

ment of Justice for pursuing charges against protesters involved in blockades.

"Many people are in jail over this," he said in June, adding, "We're going to get that taken care of immediately."

Abortion rights advocates slammed Trump's pardons as evidence of his opposition to abortion access, despite his vague, contradictory statements on the issue as he attempted to find a middle ground on the campaign trail between anti-abortion allies and the majority of Americans who support abortion rights.

"Donald Trump on the campaign trail tried to have it both ways — bragging about his role in overturning Roe v. Wade while saying he wasn't going to take action on abortion," said Ryan Stitzlein, vice president of political and government relations for the national abortion rights organization Reproductive Freedom for All. "We never believed that that was true, and this shows us that we were right."

SBA Pro-Life America President Marjorie Dannenfelser thanked Trump for "immediately delivering on his promise" to pardon the protesters, arguing their prosecutions were political.

The legal group Thomas More Society argued the FACE Act defendants they represent had been "unjustly imprisoned" in a January letter to Trump. The group had assured the defendants that Trump would review their cases and pardon them when he took office, according to the letter.

"Today, freedom rings in our great nation," Steve Crampton, senior counsel for the Thomas More Society, said Thursday, adding, "What happened to them can never be erased, but today's pardons are a huge step towards restoring justice."

Republican Sen. Josh Hawley, among Trump's most loyal supporters, called the prosecution of anti-abortion protesters "a grotesque assault on the principles of this country" and urged Trump to pardon them while reading the stories of such anti-abortion protesters on the Senate floor Thursday. He highlighted Eva Edl, who was involved in a 2021 Tennessee clinic blockade and whose story has garnered attention from the largest national anti-abortion groups.

Hawley said he "had a great conversation" Thursday morning with Trump about the protesters.

The news of the pardons comes ahead of Friday's annual anti-abortion protest March for Life in Washington, where the president is expected to address the crowd in a video.

Gulf of Whatnow? Trump's geographic renaming plans leave mapmakers pondering what to do next

By LAURIE KELLMAN and HILLEL ITALIE Associated Press

What's in a name change, after all?

The water bordered by the Southern United States, Mexico and Cuba will be critical to shipping lanes and vacationers whether it's called the Gulf of Mexico, as it has been for four centuries, or the Gulf of America, as President Donald Trump ordered this week. North America's highest mountain peak will still loom above Alaska whether it's called Denali, as ordered by former President Barack Obama in 2015, or changed back to Mt. McKinley as Trump also decreed.

But Trump's territorial assertions, in line with his "America First" worldview, sparked a round of rethinking by mapmakers and teachers, snark on social media and sarcasm by at least one other world leader. And though Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis put the Trumpian "Gulf of America" on an official document and some other gulf-adjacent states were considering doing the same, it was not clear how many others would follow Trump's lead.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum joked that if Trump went ahead with the renaming, her country would rename North America "Mexican America." On Tuesday, she toned it down: "For us and for the entire world it will continue to be called the Gulf of Mexico."

The politics of maps are undeniable

Map lines are inherently political. After all, they're representations of the places that are important to human beings — and those priorities can be delicate and contentious, even more so in a globalized world where multiple nations often share the same maps.

There's no agreed-upon scheme to name boundaries and features across the Earth.

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"Denali" is the mountain's preferred name for Alaska Natives, while "McKinley" is a tribute to President William McKinley, designated in the late 19th century by a gold prospector. China sees Taiwan as its own territory, and the countries surrounding what the United States calls the South China Sea have multiple names for the same body of water.

The Persian Gulf has been widely known by that name since the 16th century, although usage of "Gulf" and "Arabian Gulf" is dominant in many countries in the Middle East. The government of Iran — formerly Persia — threatened to sue Google in 2012 over the company's decision not to label the body of water at all on its maps. Many Arab countries don't recognize Israel and instead call it Palestine. And in many official releases, Israel calls the occupied West Bank by its biblical name, "Judea and Samaria."

Americans and Mexicans diverge on what to call another key body of water, the river that forms the border between Texas and the Mexican states of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Americans call it the Rio Grande; Mexicans call it the Rio Bravo.

Trump's executive order — titled "Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness" — concludes thusly: "It is in the national interest to promote the extraordinary heritage of our Nation and ensure future generations of American citizens celebrate the legacy of our American heroes. The naming of our national treasures, including breathtaking natural wonders and historic works of art, should honor the contributions of visionary and patriotic Americans in our Nation's rich past."

But what to call the gulf with the 3,700-mile coastline?

"It is, I suppose, an internationally recognized sea, but (to be honest), a situation like this has never come up before so I need to confirm the appropriate convention," said Peter Bellerby, who said he was talking over the issue with the cartographers at his London company, Bellerby & Co. Globemakers. "If, for instance, he wanted to change the Atlantic Ocean to the American Ocean, we would probably just ignore it."

For some, it's decision time

As of Thursday afternoon, map applications for Google and Apple still called the mountain and the gulf by their old names. Spokespersons for those platforms did not immediately respond to emailed questions.

A spokesperson for National Geographic, one of the most prominent map makers in the U.S., said this week that the company does not comment on individual cases and referred questions to a statement on its web site, which reads in part that it "strives to be apolitical, to consult multiple authoritative sources, and to make independent decisions based on extensive research." National Geographic also has a policy of including explanatory notes for place names in dispute, citing as an example a body of water between Japan and the Korean peninsula, referred to as the Sea of Japan by the Japanese and the East Sea by Koreans.

The Associated Press, which disseminates news around the world to multiple audiences, will refer to the Gulf of Mexico by its original name while acknowledging the name Gulf of America. AP will, however, use the name Mount McKinley instead of Denali; the area lies solely in the United States and as president, Trump has the authority to change federal geographical names within the country.

And at the Interior Department, a spokesman said Thursday that staff are working to comply with the president's executive order quickly.

In discussion on social media, one thread noted that the Sears Tower in Chicago was renamed the Willis Tower in 2009, though it's still commonly known by its original moniker. Pennsylvania's capital, Harrisburg, renamed its Market Street to Martin Luther King Boulevard and then switched back to Market Street several years later — with loud complaints both times. In 2017, New York's Tappan Zee Bridge was renamed for the late Gov. Mario Cuomo to great controversy. The new name appears on maps, but "no one calls it that," noted another user.

"Are we going to start teaching this as the name of the body of water?" asked one Reddit poster on Tuesday.

"I guess you can tell students that SOME PEOPLE want to rename this body of water the Gulf of America, but everyone else in the world calls it the Gulf of Mexico," came one answer. "Cover all your bases — they know the reality-based name, but also the wannabe name as well."

Wrote another user: "I'll call it the Gulf of America when I'm forced to call the Tappan Zee the Mario

Cuomo Bridge, which is to say never.”

The Senate confirms John Ratcliffe to lead the CIA, giving Trump his second Cabinet member

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate on Thursday confirmed John Ratcliffe as CIA director, President Donald Trump’s nominee to lead America’s premier spy agency and his second nominee to win Senate approval.

Ratcliffe was director of national intelligence during Trump’s first term and is the first person to have held that position and the top post at the CIA. The Texas Republican is a former federal prosecutor who emerged as a fierce Trump defender while serving as a congressman during Trump’s first impeachment.

The vote was 74-25, with many Democrats voting no.

At his Senate hearing last week, Ratcliffe said the CIA must do better when it comes to using technology such as artificial intelligence to confront adversaries including Russia and China. He said the United States needed to improve its intelligence capabilities while also ensuring the protection of Americans’ civil rights.

Ratcliffe said he would push the CIA to do more to harness technologies such as AI and quantum computing while expanding use of human intelligence collection.

“We’re not where we’re supposed to be,” Ratcliffe told members of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

While some Democrats raised questions about Ratcliffe’s ability to lead the CIA objectively, Republicans hailed his experience and said they looked forward to confirming the rest of Trump’s national security nominees.

Ratcliffe was sworn into office shortly after winning Senate confirmation.

Former Florida Sen. Marco Rubio was confirmed earlier this week as secretary of state, the first member of Trump’s Cabinet.

The CIA director has not always been a part of a president’s Cabinet, though President Joe Biden elevated the position to Cabinet level under Ratcliffe’s predecessor, William Burns, and Trump’s White House lists Ratcliffe as a Cabinet member.

Trump and other Republicans have criticized the work of the CIA and other spy agencies, saying they have focused too much on climate change, workforce diversity and other issues.

The calls for a broad overhaul have worried some current and former intelligence officials who say the changes could make the country less safe.

Ratcliffe has said he views China as America’s greatest geopolitical rival, and that Russia, Iran, North Korea and drug cartels, hacking gangs and terrorist organizations also pose challenges to national security.

He supports the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, a government spying program that allows authorities to collect without warrant the communications of non-Americans outside the country. If those people are communicating with Americans, those conversations can be swept up, too, which has led to questions about violations of personal rights.

Like other Trump nominees, Ratcliffe is a Trump loyalist. Aside from his work to defend Trump during his first impeachment proceedings, Ratcliffe also forcefully questioned former special counsel Robert Mueller when he testified before lawmakers about his investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election.

As director of national intelligence, Ratcliffe oversaw and coordinated the work of more than a dozen spy agencies. Among other duties, the office directs efforts to detect and counter foreign efforts to influence U.S. politics.

Trump picked Ratcliffe to serve in that position in 2019, but he quickly withdrew from consideration after lawmakers raised questions about his qualifications. He was ultimately confirmed by a sharply divided Senate after Trump resubmitted the nomination.

In that job, Ratcliffe was accused by Democrats of politicizing intelligence when he declassified Russian intelligence that purported to reveal information about Democrats during the 2016 election even as he acknowledged the information might not be accurate.

Before Thursday's confirmation vote Democrats questioned whether Ratcliffe would place his loyalty to Trump ahead of the duties of the office. Concerns raised by Democrats earlier in the week forced the Senate to postpone Ratcliffe's confirmation vote by two days.

Trump's second-term nominee for director of national intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, likely faces a tougher road to confirmation. Gabbard, a former Democratic congresswoman from Hawaii, has faced bipartisan criticism over past comments supportive of Russia and 2017 meetings with then-Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Gabbard's confirmation hearing before the Senate Intelligence Committee is scheduled for Jan. 30.

Purdue Pharma and owners to pay \$7.4 billion in settlement of lawsuits over the toll of OxyContin

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Members of the family who own OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma, and the company itself, agreed to pay up to \$7.4 billion in a new settlement to lawsuits over the toll of the powerful prescription painkiller, the attorneys general from several states announced Thursday.

The deal, agreed to by Purdue Pharma, the Sackler family members who own the company and lawyers representing state and local governments and thousands of victims of the opioid crisis, replaces a previous settlement deal that was rejected last year by the U.S. Supreme Court.

In the new one, the Sacklers agreed to pay up to \$6.5 billion and give up ownership of the company, which would pay nearly \$900 million. The maximum contribution from family members is \$500 million more than the previous deal.

It's among the largest settlements reached over the past several years in a series of lawsuits by local, state, Native American tribal governments and others seeking to hold companies responsible for a deadly epidemic. Aside from the Purdue deal, others worth around \$50 billion have been announced — and most of the money is required to be used to stem the crisis.

The deal still needs court approval, and some of the details are yet to be ironed out. An arm of the federal Department of Justice opposed the previous settlement, even after every state agreed, and took the battle to the U.S. Supreme Court. But under President Donald Trump, the federal government is not expected to oppose the new deal.

"We are extremely pleased that a new agreement has been reached that will deliver billions of dollars to compensate victims, abate the opioid crisis, and deliver treatment and overdose rescue medicines that will save lives," Stamford, Connecticut-based Purdue said in a statement.

Representatives for Sackler family members did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Kara Trainor, a Michigan woman in recovery for 17 years, said she became addicted to opioids after receiving a prescription for OxyContin to deal with a back injury 23 years ago. She praised the deal.

"Everything in my life is shaped by a company that put profits over human lives," she said.

"While no amount of money will ever fully repair the damage they caused, this massive influx of funds will bring resources to communities in need so that we can heal," said New York Attorney General Letitia James, one of 15 state attorneys general involved in negotiating the deal.

In West Virginia, the epicenter of the opioid crisis, Attorney General JB McCuskey agreed to the deal but had harsh words for the company and its owners. "While West Virginians' lives were being destroyed by opioid addiction, the Sacklers were cashing in every time someone got hooked — getting rich with no regard to the toll their drugs were taking on people, families and our communities," the Republican said in a statement.

Not every state has signed on yet. A spokesperson for Washington Attorney General Nick Brown said the office is still reviewing the deal and weighing its options.

Under the new proposal, like the previous one, members of the Sackler family would also give up ownership of Purdue. They've already stepped down from the company's board and have not taken distributions

from Purdue since before the bankruptcy filing. The company would become a new entity with its board appointed by states and others who sued the company.

Between \$800 million and \$850 million is also to go to victims of the opioid crisis or their survivors, said Ed Neiger, a lawyer for individual victims; that's a feature something that most opioid settlements do not include. The deal also includes as much as \$800 million set aside to pay for future settlements if new lawsuits arise against the Sacklers, according to the New York attorney general's office.

The Supreme Court blocked the earlier agreement last year because it protected members of the wealthy family from civil lawsuits over OxyContin — even though the family members themselves were not in bankruptcy. The new agreement protects family members from lawsuits only from entities that agree to the settlement.

If a new deal is not approved, it could open the floodgates to lawsuits against Sackler family members. A U.S. bankruptcy judge is expected to decide Friday whether to keep temporary protections for them in place through February.

The new settlement could bring to a close a chapter in a long legal saga over the toll of an opioid crisis that some experts assert began after OxyContin hit the market in 1996. Since then, opioids have been linked to hundreds of thousands of deaths in the U.S. The deadliest stretch has been since 2020, when illicit fentanyl has been found as a factor in more than 70,000 deaths annually.

Members of the Sackler family have been cast as villains and have seen their name removed from art galleries and universities around the world because of their role in the privately-held company. They've continued to deny claims of any wrongdoing.

Collectively, family members have been estimated to be worth billions more than they'd contribute in the settlement, but much of the wealth is in offshore accounts and might be impossible to access through lawsuits.

Connecticut Attorney General William Tong, a Democrat, said the settlement would not bring the family financial ruin.

"This is about families impacted by this crisis. And this is about a group of people and a family that are among the most notorious wrongdoers ... and we are holding them accountable," he said.

Purdue sought bankruptcy protection in 2019 as it faced thousands of lawsuits over the opioid crisis. Among the claims are that the company targeted doctors with a message that the addiction risk to the powerful painkillers was low.

In an October 2024 filing, one branch of the family pledged to defend itself in any cases that are allowed to move ahead, saying that the legal theory at the heart of the lawsuits — that Purdue and Sackler family members created a "public nuisance" — "is utterly devoid of merits."

Teen who killed 3 girls at Taylor Swift-themed dance class in England sentenced to over 50 years

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A teenager who stabbed three young girls to death at a Taylor Swift-themed dance class in England was sentenced Thursday to more than 50 years in prison for what a judge called "the most extreme, shocking and exceptionally serious crime."

Judge Julian Goose said 18-year-old Axel Rudakubana "wanted to try and carry out mass murder of innocent, happy young girls."

Goose said that he couldn't impose a sentence of life without parole, because Rudakubana was under 18 when he committed the crime.

But the judge said he must serve 52 years, minus the six months he's been in custody, before being considered for parole, and "it is likely he will never be released."

Rudakubana was 17 when he attacked the children in the seaside town of Southport in July, killing Alice Da Silva Aguiar, 9, Elsie Dot Stancombe, 7, and Bebe King, 6. He wounded eight other girls, ranging in age from 7 to 13, along with teacher Leanne Lucas and John Hayes, a local businessman who intervened.

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The attack shocked the country and set off both street violence and soul-searching. The government has announced a public inquiry into how the system failed to stop the killer, who had been referred to the authorities multiple times over his obsession with violence.

Defendant disrupts the hearing

Rudakubana faced three counts of murder, 10 of attempted murder and additional charges of possessing a knife, the poison ricin and an al-Qaida manual. He unexpectedly changed his plea to guilty on all charges on Monday.

But he wasn't in court to hear sentence passed on Thursday.

Hours earlier he had been led into the dock at Liverpool Crown Court in northwest England, dressed in a gray prison tracksuit. But as prosecutors began outlining the evidence, Rudakubana interrupted by shouting that he felt ill and wanted to see a paramedic.

Goose ordered the accused to be removed when he continued shouting. A person in the courtroom shouted "Coward!" as Rudakubana was taken out.

The hearing continued without him.

Horror on a summer day

Prosecutor Deanna Heer described how the attack occurred on the first day of summer vacation when 26 little girls were "gathered around the tables making bracelets and singing along to Taylor Swift songs."

Rudakubana, armed with a large knife, intruded and began stabbing the girls and their teacher.

The court was shown video of the suspect arriving at the Hart Space venue in a taxi and entering the building. Within seconds, screams erupted and children ran outside in panic, some of them wounded. One girl made it to the doorway, but was pulled back inside by the attacker. She was stabbed 32 times but survived.

Gasps and sobs could be heard in court as the videos played.

Heer said two of the dead children "suffered particularly horrific injuries which are difficult to explain as anything other than sadistic in nature." One of the dead girls had 122 injuries, while another suffered 85 wounds.

A teenager obsessed with violence

The prosecutor said Rudakubana had "a longstanding obsession with violence, killing, genocide."

"His only purpose was to kill. And he targeted the youngest and most vulnerable in society," she said, as relatives of the victims watched on in the courtroom.

Heer said that when he was taken to a police station, Rudakubana was heard to say: "It's a good thing those children are dead, I'm so glad, I'm so happy."

The killings triggered days of anti-immigrant violence across the country after far-right activists seized on incorrect reports that the attacker was an asylum-seeker who had recently arrived in the U.K. Some suggested the crime was a jihadi attack, and alleged that police and the government were withholding information.

Rudakubana was born in Cardiff, Wales, to Christian parents from Rwanda, and investigators haven't been able to pin down his motivation. Police found documents about subjects including Nazi Germany, the Rwandan genocide and car bombs on his devices.

In the years before the attack, he had been reported to multiple authorities over his violent interests and actions. All of the agencies failed to spot the danger he posed.

In 2019, he phoned a children's advice line to ask "What should I do if I want to kill somebody?" He said he had taken a knife to school because he wanted to kill someone who was bullying him. Two months later, he attacked a fellow student with a hockey stick and was convicted of assault.

The definition of terrorism

Prosecutors said Rudakubana was referred three times to the government's anti-extremism program, Prevent, when he was 13 and 14 — once after researching school shootings in class, then for uploading pictures of Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi to Instagram and for researching a London terror attack.

But they concluded his crimes should not be classed as terrorism because Rudakubana had no discern-

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able political or religious cause. Heer said "his purpose was the commission of mass murder, not for a particular end, but as an end in itself."

Prime Minister Keir Starmer said this week the country must face up to a "new threat" from violent individuals whose mix of motivations test the traditional definition of terrorism.

"After one of the most harrowing moments in our country's history, we owe it to these innocent young girls and all those affected to deliver the change that they deserve," Starmer said after the sentencing.

Wrenching testimony from victims

Several relatives and survivors read emotional statements in court, describing how the attack had shattered their lives.

Lucas, 36, who ran the dance class, said that "the trauma of being both a victim and a witness has been horrendous."

"I cannot give myself compassion or accept praise, as how can I live knowing I survived when children died?" she said.

A 14-year-old survivor, who can't be named because of a court order, said that while she was physically recovering. "we will all have to live with the mental pain from that day forever."

"I hope you spend the rest of your life knowing that we think you're a coward," she said.

The prosecutor read out a statement from the parents of Alice Da Silva Aguiar, who said their daughter's killing had "shattered our souls."

"We used to cook for three. Now we only cook for two. It doesn't seem right," they said. "Alice was our purpose for living, so what do we do now?"

'Emilia Pérez' tops Oscar nominations with 13, 'Wicked' and 'The Brutalist' land 10 apiece

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

In the wake of devastating wildfires in Los Angeles that struck at the heart of the movie industry, an embattled Hollywood lined up behind the Netflix narco-musical about trans identity "Emilia Pérez" in Oscar nominations Thursday.

Jacques Audiard's "Emilia Pérez," a Spanish-language, French-made film, dominated the nominations with a leading 13 nominations, including best picture and best actress for Karla Sofía Gascón, making her the first openly trans actor ever nominated for an Oscar. The film also landed nominations for directing, original screenplay, two for its songs and for Zoe Saldaña's supporting performance.

"This recognition is a celebration of the global world we live in," Audiard said in a statement.

Netflix, despite its starring role in Hollywood, has never won best picture. Many of its top contenders have previously racked up large numbers of nominations (including "Mank," "The Irishman" and "Roma") but gone home with only a handful of trophies.

"Emilia Pérez," though, may be its best chance yet. It became the most nominated non-English language film ever, surpassing Netflix's own "Roma," which landed 10 nominations. Only three films — "All About Eve," "Titanic" and "La La Land" — have scored more nominations in Academy Awards history.

Another musical — "Wicked," the smash Broadway adaptation — came away with nearly as many nominations. Jon M. Chu's lavish "Wizard of Oz" riff collected 10 nominations, including best picture and acting nods for its stars, Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande.

"The Brutalist," Brady Corbet's postwar epic filmed in VistaVision and released by A24, also came away with a commanding 10 nominations, including best picture, best director and acting nominations for Adrien Brody, Guy Pearce and Felicity Jones.

The 10 nominees for best picture are: "Anora"; "The Brutalist"; "A Complete Unknown"; "Conclave"; "Dune: Part Two"; "Emilia Pérez"; "I'm Still Here."; "Nickel Boys"; "The Substance" and "Wicked."

Last year, 'Oppenheimer' rolled. This year is different

In a wide-open Oscar race, the six most honored films — "Emilia Pérez," "Wicked," "The Brutalist," "Anora" (six nominations) "Conclave" (eight nominations) and "A Complete Unknown" (eight nominations)

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— all fared as expected. The biggest surprises were the Brazilian film "I'm Still Here," a portrait of political resistance under Brazil's military dictatorship that also landed Fernanda Torres a best actress nomination, and RaMell Ross' "Nickel Boys," a daringly crafted first-person POV-shot drama that reconsiders how Black life and pain is depicted on screen.

"Nickel Boys" director RaMell Ross watched the nominations with popcorn Thursday morning in Providence, Rhode Island.

"This film forces a subjective response. It forces someone to speak their mind," said Ross. "This film is a film that needs discourse. It's a film that's built for discourse. The film is a discourse amongst itself. I can't wait to do it more."

Those nominees likely displaced a few best picture possibilities in the prison drama "Sing Sing," the journalism thriller "September 5" and the tender comedy "A Real Pain," though those films all landed nominations elsewhere.

One of 2024's most audacious films, "The Apprentice" landed a surprising pair of nominations, for Sebastian Stan and Jeremy Strong. The film dramatizes the formative years of President Donald Trump (Stan) in New York real estate under the tutelage of attorney Roy Cohn (Strong). Trump has called those involved with the film "human scum."

"He called us 'human scum,' and I actually feel afraid talking to you about that right now. And that is an alarming feeling to be having in this country in 2025," Strong said by phone Thursday from his home in Brooklyn.

"On a level of artistry, today, for me personally, is an incredible day and I feel very happy," Strong added of his first Oscar nomination. "And I have complicated feelings about the character I played. It was the role of a lifetime and at the same time his legacy is real and it's playing out in situ in front of our eyes in very frightening ways."

In the best actor category, where Stan and Brody were nominated, the other nominees were Timothée Chalamet ("A Complete Unknown"), Colman Domingo ("Sing Sing") and Ralph Fiennes ("Conclave"). Most notably left out was Daniel Craig, acclaimed for his very un-James Bond performance in "Queer."

Best actress, a category that Demi Moore has appeared to have locked up for her full-bodied performance in "The Substance," saw nominations for Moore, Gascón, Torres, Erivo and the star of "Anora," Mikey Madison. Arguably the year's most competitive category, that left out Marianne Jean-Baptiste ("Hard Truths"), Pamela Anderson, ("The Last Showgirl"), Nicole Kidman ("Babygirl") and Angelina Jolie ("Maria").

"I'm a Los Angeles native and so there's been so much devastation these past few weeks and my heart breaks for LA. but it's really beautiful to see everyone coming together," Madison said Thursday. "Hollywood coming together and celebrating film right now is really beautiful."

In the directing category, "The Substance" filmmaker Coralie Fargeat managed to crack into the otherwise all-male group of Sean Baker ("Anora"), Corbet, Audiard and James Mangold ("A Complete Unknown"). Most had expected Edward Berger to be nominated for directing the papal thriller "Conclave."

Supporting actor was led by Kieran Culkin, the favorite for the award, for his performance in "A Real Pain." The other nominees were: Yura Borisov ("Anora"), Guy Pearce ("The Brutalist"), Edward Norton ("A Complete Unknown") and Strong. Supporting actress nominations went to Grande, Saldaña, Jones, Monica Barbaro ("A Complete Unknown") and Isabella Rossellini ("Conclave").

Oscars push ahead, despite fires

The nominations had originally been planned for Jan. 17. But after wildfires on Jan. 7 began burning through the Pacific Palisades, Altadena and other areas around Los Angeles, leaving behind historic levels of destruction, the academy extended its voting window and twice postponed the nominations announcement. Fresh fires outside Los Angeles continued during the nominations, announced by Bowen Yang and Rachel Sennott.

With so many in the film industry reeling, some called on the academy to cancel the Oscars altogether. Academy leaders have argued the March 2 ceremony must go ahead, for their economic impact on Los Angeles and as a symbol of resilience. Organizers have vowed this year's awards will "celebrate the work that unites us as a global film community and acknowledge those who fought so bravely against the wildfires."

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"We will reflect on the recent events while highlighting the strength, creativity, and optimism that defines Los Angeles and our industry," Bill Kramer, academy chief executive, and Janet Yang, president, said in an email to members Wednesday.

But much of the usual frothiness Hollywood's awards season has been severely curtailed due to the fires. The film academy canceled its annual nominees luncheon. Other events have been postponed or downsized. On Wednesday, Kramer and Yang said original song nominees won't be performed this year. Conan O'Brien, whose Pacific Palisades home was spared by the fires, is hosting.

Blockbusters (mostly) sit it out

The Oscar nominations followed an up-and-down year for Hollywood that saw expansive post-strike delays, wide swaths of unemployed workers due to an industry-wide production slowdown and the tragedy of the fires. Most humbling, perhaps, was the presidential election that returned Trump to office in a race where podcaster Joe Rogan seemed to hold more sway than all A-listers combined.

At the same time, even amid a downturn for the superhero film, the industry rallied behind some galvanizing hits, including Universal Pictures' "Wicked," and three Walt Disney Co. \$1 billion grossers in "Inside Out 2," "Deadpool and Wolverine" and "Moana 2."

Those films missed nominations except for "Inside Out 2," which joined the best animated nominees of "The Wild Robot," "Flow," "Memoir of a Snail" and "Wallace and Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl." Otherwise, the biggest hits to join the Oscar mix were "Wicked" (\$710.3 million worldwide) and "Dune: Part Two" (\$714.6 million). Netflix doesn't report box office, so "Emilia Pérez" has no tallied ticket sales, and hasn't been among the streamer's top watches, either.

That uncertain state of the movies seemed to be reflected in the nominations, which were spread across films both widely seen and little noticed, theatrically released and predominantly streaming. Several movies that studios and streamers had declined to release — including "The Apprentice" and the Israeli-Palestinian documentary "No Other Land," which still lacks a distributor — were vindicated with nominations.

But unlike last year, when Hollywood rallied around the success of "Oppenheimer," this year offered up no clear frontrunner for the industry's top honor. With five weeks to go until the Oscar ceremony, at least four or five movies — including "The Brutalist," "Emilia Pérez," "Anora," "Conclave" and "Wicked" — are seen having a shot at best picture.

Trump tells Davos elite to invest in US or face tariffs

By ZEKE MILLER, JOSH BOAK and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump used an address Thursday to the World Economic Forum to promise global elites lower taxes if they bring manufacturing to the U.S. and threatened to impose tariffs if they don't.

Speaking by video from the White House to the annual summit in Davos, Switzerland, on his third full day in office, Trump ran through his flurry of executive actions since his swearing-in and claimed that he had a "massive mandate" from the American people to bring change. He laid out a carrot-and-stick approach for private investment in the U.S.

"Come make your product in America and we will give you among the lowest taxes as any nation on earth," Trump said. "But if you don't make your product in America, which is your prerogative, then very simply, you will have to pay a tariff — differing amounts — but a tariff, which will direct hundreds of billions of dollars and even trillions of dollars into our treasury to strengthen our economy and pay down debt under the Trump administration."

Trump, who spoke Wednesday to Saudi Arabia's crown prince, also said Thursday that the kingdom wants to invest \$600 billion in the U.S. but that he would ask Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to increase it to \$1 trillion. The remark drew some laughter from the crowd in the hall in Davos.

Introducing Trump, Davos founder Klaus Schwab told the new president that his return and his agenda have "been at the focus of our discussions this week." He invited Trump to speak at the summit in person next year.

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Trump, who promised to end the Russia-Ukraine war before taking office, said it remained a top priority, but he offered few clues for how he would do so.

"One thing very important: I really would like to be able to meet with President Putin soon and get that war ended," Trump told the Davos audience. "We really have to stop that war. That war is horrible"

Earlier in his address to the forum, Trump laid blame on the OPEC+ alliance of oil exporting countries for keeping the price of oil too high for much of the nearly three-year war. Oil sales are the economic engine driving Moscow's economy.

"If the price came down, the Russia-Ukraine war would end immediately," Trump said. He added about OPEC+, "They are very responsible to a certain extent for what's taking place."

Oil prices have more recently slumped due to weaker-than-expected demand from China as well as increased production from countries such as Brazil and Argentina that aren't in OPEC+.

In the largest hall in the Davos Congress Center — seating capacity 850 — Trump's appearance drew nearly standing-room-only turnout. The crowd included diplomats, human rights advocates, academics and business leaders. His return to the White House and his barrage of executive orders have been the talk of the town this week in the snowy Swiss town.

At times, Trump drew a few groans, like when he derided "inept" members of the outgoing Biden administration. The loudest laughter came when WEF President Borge Brende said Trump had called Chinese President Xi Jinping over the weekend, and the U.S. leader quickly corrected him: "He called me."

The reaction from the audience was mixed. Some attendees enjoyed the attention from Trump.

"I was impressed (by) the force of his convictions and by what he said. I don't share his opinion on many topics, but I thought he was well prepared and knew who he was talking to," said Benedict Fontanet, a Swiss lawyer.

Others cringed at the "America First" ambitions of Trump yet again.

"It's absolute determination to 'make America great again' at the expense of the rest of the world," said Agnes Callamard, secretary general of Amnesty International. "It's favoring American workers at the expense of workers everywhere ... There's nothing, nothing about the rest of the world."

Oscar nominations snubs and surprises, from Daniel Craig to Selena Gomez

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

PARK CITY, Utah (AP) — In one of the more wide-open Oscar fields in recent history, there were plenty of nominations surprises Thursday.

Not too long ago, it seemed that people like Angelina Jolie and Nicole Kidman were destined for best actress nominations, while general audience disinterest in the young Donald Trump movie "The Apprentice" might have indicated its awards chances were dead on arrival.

But the members of the film academy had something different in mind. Here are some of the biggest snubs and surprises from the 97th Oscar nominations.

SURPRISE: Jeremy Strong and Sebastian Stan, "The Apprentice"

The young Trump movie "The Apprentice" has been one of the bigger awards season question marks, especially after it failed to resonate with moviegoers in theaters. And yet both Jeremy Strong, for his portrayal of Trump lawyer Roy Cohn, and Sebastian Stan (who was also in the conversation for "A Different Man"), for playing the future two-time president, made it in. Only Strong got nominated by the Screen Actors Guild.

SNUB: Marianne Jean-Baptiste, "Hard Truths"

This will forever be one of the more confounding awards season oversights. Marianne Jean-Baptiste delivered one of the all-time great performances in Mike Leigh's "Hard Truths," as the perpetually aggrieved and sharp-tongued London woman Pansy. The general thinking is that it was either going to be Jean-Baptiste or Fernanda Torres, and Torres got in for the equally beloved "I'm Still Here."

SNUB: Pamela Anderson, "The Last Showgirl"

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This is perhaps up for debate, but there was certainly a lot of goodwill behind Anderson's movie-star turn in Gia Coppola's "The Last Showgirl," especially considering her SAG nomination. But like with Jennifer Lopez and "Hustlers" a few years ago, it was not meant to be at the Oscars.

SURPRISE: James Mangold, "A Complete Unknown"

James Mangold has directed several awards darlings, including "Ford v Ferrari" and "Walk the Line" but had consistently missed out on a best director nomination, until this year with "A Complete Unknown." It may have come at the expense of Edward Berger, who missed out on a nod for "Conclave" or Denis Villeneuve for "Dune: Part Two."

SNUB: Daniel Craig, "Queer"

Daniel Craig gave one of his best performances as an American expat in Mexico in the torrid May-December romance in "Queer," but it hasn't been resonating with awards voters. The Oscar snub is the final piece in a puzzle that just never came together.

SNUB: Angelina Jolie, "Maria"

If there ever were a shoo-in for a nomination and an Oscar, on paper at least, it would be for Angelina Jolie playing opera legend Maria Callas. Filmmaker Pablo Larraín had not missed yet in getting best actress nominations for his famous, tragic women biopics, including Natalie Portman for "Jackie" and Kristen Stewart for "Spencer." But somehow Jolie did not make the cut in the end.

SNUB: Nicole Kidman, "Babygirl"

"Babygirl" is not a cliché awards movie by a long stretch, but Nicole Kidman's performance as Romy, the buttoned-up, married CEO who begins a dangerous affair with a young intern at her company was undeniable. But a best actress win at the Venice Film Festival has never guaranteed Oscar success.

SURPRISE: Felicity Jones, "The Brutalist"

Despite the wide love for "The Brutalist," Felicity Jones has been curiously absent from many nominations lists for her sharp portrayal of Erzsébet Tóth. The cast did not even get recognized by SAG. But it just goes to show that it's never too late to sneak in for the big one

SNUB: Danielle Deadwyler, "The Piano Lesson"

A few years after Danielle Deadwyler was famously snubbed for "Till," she has another snub to add to her resume for Malcolm Washington's adaptation of "The Piano Lesson." This latest campaign might not have had as much steam behind it as "Till," but at the very least one would assume that it could have been a make good.

SURPRISE: Monica Barbaro, "A Complete Unknown"

Supporting actress was one of the more chaotic and unpredictable categories this year, with so many deserving performers in the mix. Monica Barbaro was one of those that was on the fringe of possibilities for her turn as Joan Baez, singing and all, for "A Complete Unknown."

SNUB: Selena Gomez, "Emilia Pérez"

One who was not so lucky was Selena Gomez for "Emilia Pérez," perhaps because she was partially competing with her co-star, Zoë Saldaña who simply had more momentum (and gave a moving speech at the Golden Globes).

SNUB: Clarence Maclin, "Sing Sing"

The incarceration drama "Sing Sing" did get several significant nominations including for Colman Domingo, adapted screenplay and original song. But Clarence "Divine Eye" Maclin, who delivered a revelatory performance based on his own experience, was not among them. He is, however, credited with helping to write the story.

SNUB: Margaret Qualley, "The Substance"

Margaret Qualley seems to have been unfairly left out of much of the awards conversation around "The Substance," a movie that only works with a great Sue. But the focus has been more on Demi Moore, overdue for such recognition, and Coralie Fargeat — the only woman to score a best director nomination.

SNUB: "Challengers" score

Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross delivered one of their most popular scores ever this year for "Challengers" and yet were left off in a batch of nominees that included "The Brutalist," "Conclave," "Emilia Pérez,"

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"Wicked" and "The Wild Robot." It's not even that they're consistently overlooked by the academy — they've already won twice, for "Soul" and "The Social Network."

SURPRISE: "Flow"

Everyone expected the Latvian cat movie "Flow" to get a best animated feature nomination, especially after it won the Golden Globe. But the big surprise is that it got a second for best international feature — a first for Latvia. This is not a first for an animated movie to get into the international category, though: "Waltz with Bashir" and "Flee" had the honor before "Flow," but neither ended up winning.

SURPRISE: "Nickel Boys"

RaMell Ross' "Nickel Boys" has had quite the rollercoaster awards season journey, even though it's widely considered one of the best films of the year. The film academy thought so too, including it among the 10 best picture nominees (alongside other relative surprises like "I'm Still Here" and "Dune: Part Two"). Oddly, though, it missed out on cinematography despite its inventive first-person point of view.

SNUB: Denzel Washington, "Gladiator II"

Denzel Washington was not about to hit the campaigning trail for "Gladiator II" but he was, at least at one point, thought to be a sure thing for a supporting nomination. In his review, AP film writer Jake Coyle wrote that Washington's "performance as the Machiavellian power broker Macrinus is a delicious blur of robes and grins — so compellingly over-the-top that he nearly reaches 1990s Al Pacino standards." But don't cry for Washington: He's notched an incredible 10 Oscar nominations in his career, including one for producing "Fences," and two wins: supporting actor for "Glory" and best actor for "Training Day."

Thai LGBTQ+ couples register marriages as law gives them equal status

By CHALIDA EKVITTHAYAVECHNUKUL Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Hundreds of 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.

By the end of Thursday some 1,832 same-sex couples had married nationwide, according to the Department of Provincial Administration. Well over 1,000 registered at district offices, while 185 couples registered their union at a daylong gala celebration at a shopping mall in central Bangkok.

The couples included actors Apiwat "Porsch" Apiwatsayree and Sappanyoo "Arm" Panatkool, who tied the knot at the Phra Nakorn district office in 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 Chantip 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," Chantip chimed in.

Activists had 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, which 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.

The AP establishes style guidance on the Gulf of Mexico and Mount McKinley

The Associated Press Associated Press

President Donald Trump signed an executive order Monday shortly after his inauguration calling for the Gulf of Mexico to be renamed the Gulf of America, and Denali, the tallest peak in the United States, to revert to the name Mount McKinley.

The Associated Press sent its staff the following style guidance for both geographic areas. We will use Gulf of Mexico, while acknowledging the name Gulf of America in our copy.

We will also use Mount McKinley rather than Denali.

— The AP

Donald Trump has signed an executive order to rename the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America. The body of water has shared borders between the U.S. and Mexico. Trump's order only carries authority within the United States. Mexico, as well as other countries and international bodies, do not have to recognize the name change.

The Gulf of Mexico has carried that name for more than 400 years. The Associated Press will refer to it by its original name while acknowledging the new name Trump has chosen. As a global news agency that disseminates news around the world, the AP must ensure that place names and geography are easily recognizable to all audiences.

We can use this language to describe the new designation in text, photo captions, and audio and video scripts: "Trump signed an executive order renaming the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America. The order

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only carries authority within the U.S. Other countries and international institutions continue to use the name the Gulf of Mexico.”

For now, our maps, graphics and interactives will use Gulf of Mexico. We continue to consult with our product partners on language and labelling.

Per the AP Stylebook, you may also use Gulf or Gulf Coast to describe the body of water along the Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida coasts.

There are other examples where the AP refers to a geographical place by more than one name. For example, the Gulf of California is sometimes referred to as the Sea of Cortez. The U.S. government has designated that body of water as the Gulf of California, while Mexico recognizes it as the Sea of Cortez.

Trump also signed an executive order to revert the name of North America’s tallest peak, Denali in Alaska, to Mount McKinley. Former President Barack Obama changed the official name to Denali in 2015 to reflect the traditions of Alaska Natives as well as the preference of many Alaska residents. Trump said in his executive order that he wanted to “restore the name of a great president, William McKinley, to Mount McKinley.”

The Associated Press will use the official name change to Mount McKinley. The area lies solely in the United States and as president, Trump has the authority to change federal geographical names within the country.

The AP Stylebook will be updated to reflect both decisions.

These two paragraphs can be included in stories as needed to explain our decision-making:

1. “The Associated Press will refer to the Gulf of Mexico by its original name while acknowledging the name, Gulf of America. As a global news agency that disseminates news around the world, the AP must ensure that place names and geography are recognizable to all audiences.”

2. “The Associated Press will use the name Mount McKinley instead of Denali. The area lies solely in the United States and as president, Trump has the authority to change federal geographical names within the country.

The AP regularly reviews its style guidance regarding name changes, in part to ensure its guidance reflects common usage. We’ll continue to apply that approach to this guidance and make updates as needed.

How to cope when disasters strip away photos, heirlooms and other pieces of the past

By JULIA RUBIN Associated Press

They’re the possessions that tell your story: the photos of old friends and relatives. The ring your mom left you. The hand-knit Christmas stockings. Your grandfather’s secretary desk and the letters inside.

When disasters strike, these artifacts of your own rich history might be the toughest belongings to lose.

“It still hits me now — a picture of my dad that my grandmother painted, which was hanging on the wall by the piano,” says Martha Tecca, whose house in Lyme, New Hampshire, burned to the ground 10 years ago. She and her husband had been on a hike, and lost everything but the clothes they were wearing.

“The things that are sort of generational — those are the pieces you feel worst about at the time,” she says.

Of course, lost things are just things. Those who mourn them are conscious that others are suffering far worse from catastrophes, including the wildfires, hurricanes, floods and other natural disasters that have struck with greater intensity in recent years.

Still, these family heirlooms, mementoes and handmade relics are irreplaceable. How do you cope with losing them — and perhaps recapture some of the lost memories?

Be patient in processing it all

“Grief is the natural response to loss, whatever that loss is,” says Mary-Frances O’Connor, a psychology professor at the University of Arizona and author of “The Grieving Body: How the Stress of Loss Can Be an Opportunity for Healing.” “Objects are often cues for our memory, our habits, for our culture, our social interaction.”

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And it takes time, she says, "to understand: What does it mean for our life that this thing is gone?"

There are so many immediate, practical tasks to attend to after a catastrophic event — finding a place to live, filing insurance claims — that it might take a while to really absorb the loss of mementoes.

In Barbara Lambert's case, she gave herself permission to stop searching for everything that might have been lost, reluctant to stir up sadness over things she hadn't looked at in a long time, anyway. Lambert's Larchmont, New York, home was gutted by the remnants of Hurricane Ida in 2021.

She grabbed documents, jewelry and medications as the waters rose around her legs. But the flood destroyed relics like scrapbooks, old Playbills from Broadway shows, ticket stubs and her son's grade-school art.

"It's very overwhelming, devastating, but you realize what you really need to get through life," she says.

Look to community

Jenny Mackenzie's home in Peacham, Vermont, was destroyed along with half her family's belongings in the floods created by the remnants of Hurricane Beryl in 2024. While she was able, over time, to find and restore items like her daughters' stuffed animals in the debris, the toughest loss was a handmade canoe she'd received as a college graduation present. She found it two weeks later in shards along the river.

Were it not for friends and neighbors, she "would have walked away" from the mud-filled house without trying to retrieve much. But dozens of people turned up to help. A neighbor came and dug up what was salvageable of her beloved garden beds, since replanted. Other neighbors spent days rescuing and restoring furniture. Picture "over 60 people shoveling mud and passing our possessions across the river," she recalls.

Natural disasters often affect entire communities, O'Connor notes, so "this is a shared loss."

"Our shared response builds meaning, and memorializes," she says.

Tecca said friends around the country sent photos to help fill the gaps in her collection, unsolicited. One friend got Tecca and her husband new copies of their college diplomas.

"In terms of things, we ended up getting more than we lost," she said.

Jack Pitney and his wife were at Toys R Us with their toddler when a mudslide slammed into their Glendale, California, house in 2005. They came home to find his playroom buried, and with it, all his toys.

"The only one he had left was in his hand: It was the one we had just bought," Pitney says. "It was a big deal. For a 2-year-old, there is no such thing as an unimportant toy."

Friends and colleagues brought toys from their own homes, helping to distract his son from what had happened.

Remember, it's not the things, it's the stories

Personal items matter because of the histories behind them, but they're not the only way to tell those tales.

"The stuff is just a vehicle for the stories," says Matt Paxton, author of "Keep the Memories, Lose the Stuff." A decluttering expert, he often works with families who struggle to let go of sentimental belongings.

Even those who have just experienced a calamity should still document and hold on to the meaning of what's lost, he says: "You're the most raw you've ever been right now. But now is the time to record the stories. You don't need the things for your legacy to live forward."

Write down the memories and tell them to your kids and friends. Document the heirlooms and their history on apps like Artifacts, he says. Digitize any photos and videos you still might have, and any going forward. Your kids' art? Scan it.

"The oldest story in the book is telling stories and passing them on — that's why it hurts so much when we lose them," he says.

While experts recommend digitizing, they acknowledge that a tactile object can evoke a more emotional response.

"Humans are such visual beings, but it's not our only sense," says Jennifer Talarico, a psychology professor at Lafayette College. She cites the feel of a souvenir in your hand, the sound of a loved one's voice on voicemail, the taste of something that takes you back to childhood.

Many items have stories that no one else would understand. Paxton remembers one family that held on to their grandmother's remote, the one she loved to watch "Jeopardy!" with.

The new stuff will carry extra meaning too

Many survivors found, with time, that not everything from the experience was negative.

"It sounds weird maybe, but there was something in there that was a little bit freeing, free of having all that stuff. Of not knowing what to do with it," said Lambert.

Going to a new home and acquiring new things marks a transitional moment, Talarico says. It's OK to mourn, but have faith that you can refill photo albums with new memories.

A disaster, she says, "might be a marker of the before and after, but there is an after."

The gifts from friends carry tremendous emotional value themselves, says Tecca, who now lives in a different town. There are new stories, of the fire and of rebuilding.

"Every piece in our house at the moment is something someone gave us, or that we intentionally got," she says. "The things become precious, the things you now fill your house with."

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

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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 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."

Screen breaks and the right desk setup offer relief from work-related eye strain

By CATHY BUSSEWITZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The trouble started every day at around 3 p.m., after Cathy Higgins had spent five or six hours staring at an array of computer screens at her desk. Her university job overseeing research projects involved peering closely at numbers and details on contracts, applications and budgets.

"My vision was so blurry, I couldn't even see what was on the screen, and I was squinting so much that I could not function," Higgins said.

When her eyesight got bad, Higgins walked around and spoke with members of her staff. She began planning in-person meetings for afternoons. But she would resume the computer work late at night after her children went to bed.

"If I had to continue working through the blurry vision, that's when the migraines would happen," Higgins said.

Digital screens are pervasive, not only at work but in our homes, schools and shops. An estimated 104 million Americans of working age spend more than seven hours a day in front of screens, according to the American Optometric Association. All that screen time can take a toll.

Too much exposure to screens can lead to dry or watery eyes, fuzzy vision and headaches. It can also lead to myopia, or nearsightedness, in some people, especially children. Some technology workers even describe short bouts of vertigo when they look at screens for too long.

Overworked eyes

One reason for the discomfort is that staring closely at screens for prolonged periods causes the muscle that helps eye focus to tighten up.

"That muscle's not supposed to stay tight all day long. And if it does, it's like picking up a light weight and trying to hold it over your head for hours," American Optometric Association President Steven Reed said. "It's not hard to pick it up. But after a while, even though it's not a heavy lift, your body just gets tired."

Fortunately, exposure to blue light from computer screens and devices has not been shown to cause permanent eye damage, according to the American Academy of Ophthalmology.

Nevertheless, symptoms can disrupt work, family time and rest. As an optometrist in Mississippi, Reed sees patients who complain of frequent eye pain, headaches and blurry vision associated with computer use. He advises getting an eye exam and taking frequent breaks.

For Higgins, trying to catch up on the work she couldn't do when her eyes were too fatigued on weekdays cut into time she spent with her daughters on weekends. "They'd be playing together, and I couldn't be as engaged as I would have liked to have been in what they were doing," she said.

Here are some tips from eye health professionals to reduce eye strain caused by devices.

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Follow the 20-20-20 rule

Take a break every 20 minutes from sitting at a computer. During the break, focus your eyes on something that's about 20 feet away for 20 seconds. Pausing close-up work and looking at something in the distance gives tired, tight muscles time to relax.

"Luckily, eye strain is temporary," said Raj Maturi, an ophthalmologist at Midwest Eye Institute in Indianapolis who serves as spokesperson for the American Academy of Ophthalmology. "The best way to avoid these symptoms is by taking breaks from our screens or near work activities and using lubricating eye drops, if needed."

People usually blink about 18 to 22 times per minute. But when looking at a screen, the rate drops to three to seven times per minute, according to the Cleveland Clinic. That's where eye drops come in.

It's good to move around and go outside, but when you don't have time for an outdoor walk, frequent 20-second breaks can help.

Change your desk setup

Some people find that using a larger computer monitor helps reduce eye fatigue. You can also increase the font size on your laptop, monitor or smartphone screen.

Higgins did all of the above after she started a new job as senior vice president at Stand Up to Cancer. Since she works remotely from home in Midlothian, Virginia, she got a 29-inch monitor and sits about three feet away from it, about a foot farther than in most office setups.

The changes helped. She still has occasional issues with blurriness, but not as frequently. "When I have an extended day, like a 12-hour day, that's when I start to have vision issues again," she said.

Sitting an arm's length away from your screen and adjusting it so you're looking slightly downward also can help reduce eye strain, according to the American Academy of Ophthalmology.

Be wary of product claims

Some products, such as blue light glasses, are marketed with claims that they will reduce digital eye strain, improve sleep and prevent eye disease. But several studies have found the glasses are not very effective, according to the American Academy of Ophthalmology. It's really our behavior with digital devices that causes symptoms, not the small amount of blue light coming from screens, the group said.

Extracurricular optics

After stepping away from computers at work, many people find themselves reading or scrolling on smartphone screens. It's not just workers: children are using laptops, tablets and smart screens in school settings throughout the day.

Too much screen time or focusing on nearby objects can accelerate the onset and progression of near-sightedness, especially in children, said Ayesha Malik, pediatric optometrist in the division of ophthalmology at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Anyone streaming shows should do so on a television, instead of a tablet, to help relieve eye strain, she said.

Children should follow the 20-20-20-2 rule, which includes an extra "2" at the end to encourage playing outdoors for 2 hours a day, which helps with eye development, she said.

"The reality is that most children are engaging with screens throughout the day at school and home. It becomes difficult to track the total number of hours," Malik said. "Aim for not more than 20 minutes during any one session."

Sleeping soundly

The blue light that digital screens emit can increase alertness, so watching Netflix on an iPad or scrolling through social media feeds in bed may make it hard to get restful sleep.

To give your eyes and brain the rest they need, doctors recommend turning off screens one to two hours before going to sleep. You can also set devices to "dark mode" in the evening to reduce the impact of bright light. If you're used to streaming videos at night, try listening to an audiobook or podcast instead.

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Today in History: January 24

Gold discovered at Sutter's Mill in California

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, Jan. 24, the 24th day of 2025. There are 341 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Jan. 24, 1848, James W. Marshall found a gold nugget at Sutter's Mill in northern California, a discovery that sparked the California gold rush.

Also on this date:

In 1945, Associated Press war correspondent Joseph Morton was among a group of captives executed by German soldiers at the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp in Austria.

In 1965, Winston Churchill died in London at age 90.

In 1978, a nuclear-powered Soviet satellite, Kosmos 954, plunged through Earth's atmosphere and disintegrated, scattering radioactive debris over parts of northern Canada.

In 1984, Apple Computer began selling its first Macintosh model, which boasted a built-in 9-inch monochrome display, a clock rate of 8 megahertz and 128k of RAM.

In 1989, confessed serial killer Ted Bundy was executed in Florida's electric chair.

In 2003, former Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge was sworn as the first secretary of the new Department of Homeland Security.

In 2011, a suicide bomber attacked Moscow's busiest airport, killing 37 people; Chechen separatists claimed responsibility.

In 2013, President Barack Obama's Defense Secretary Leon Panetta announced the lifting of a ban on women serving in combat.

In 2018, former sports doctor Larry Nassar, who had admitted to molesting some of the nation's top gymnasts for years under the guise of medical treatment, was sentenced to 40 to 175 years in prison.

Today's birthdays: Cajun musician Doug Kershaw is 89. Singer-songwriter Ray Stevens is 86. Singer-songwriter Neil Diamond is 84. Singer Aaron Neville is 84. Physicist Michio Kaku is 78. Actor Daniel Auteuil is 75. Comedian Yakov Smirnoff is 74. Actor William Allen Young is 71. Musician Jools Holland is 67. Actor Nastassja Kinski is 64. Olympic gymnastics gold medalist Mary Lou Retton is 57. Actor Matthew Lillard is 55. Musician Beth Hart is 53. Actor Ed Helms is 51. Actor-comedian Kristen Schaal is 47. Actor Tatyana Ali is 46. Actor Carrie Coon is 44. Actor Daveed Diggs is 43. Actor Mischa Barton is 39. NFL coach Sean McVay is 39. Soccer player Luis Suárez is 38.