

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Good Morning

Let's make this a Wonderful  
Wednesday!

☀️ **Hello, Everyone!** ☀️

**A new day, a fresh start, and endless opportunities to make it amazing!**  
**Let's fill today with kindness, gratitude, and unstoppable Praise to The Most High God!**

**What's one thing you're grateful for this morning? Share in the comments and let's spread the positivity, Love and Joy!** ☀️  
**Praying you all have a Beautiful day ahead.**



God's Spoken  
Word Ministries

**To God be the  
glory!**

### Wednesday, Jan. 29

Senior Menu: Breaded cod, rice pilaf, tomato spoon salad, blushing pears, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Cereal.  
School Lunch: Chicken pasta, cooked broccoli.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.  
Groton United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.  
Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.  
High School Baseball Informational Meeting, 6:30 p.m., Groton Legion

### Thursday, Jan. 30

Senior Menu: Goulash, corn, pineapple, breadstick.  
School Breakfast: Pancake on stick.  
School Lunch: Hamburgers, fries.  
Boys JH Basketball hosts Webster in the GHS Gym, 7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.  
Girls Basketball hosts Webster (C-5 p.m., JV-6:15, varsity to follow)

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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.**

## Funding Freeze Halted

A federal judge temporarily blocked the Trump administration's order yesterday to pause funding for all federal grants, loans, and other financial assistance just minutes before the directive was scheduled to go into effect. The block lasts until Monday afternoon and sets a hearing for arguments that morning.

The White House's order intended to temporarily halt trillions of dollars in aid to initiatives including education, healthcare, child care, disaster relief, housing assistance, and small businesses. The Office of Management and Budget sent a two-page memo and an 836-page spreadsheet to federal agencies Monday night, asking them to provide details about their spending programs.

The move aimed to review funding to ensure financial assistance programs align with President Donald Trump's policies. Critics argue the order violates the 1974 Impoundment Control Act, which outlines the procedure presidents must follow when they seek to withhold funds—much of which is authorized and required to be disbursed by Congress via the annual appropriations process.

Separately, Trump is reportedly offering buyouts to federal workers who don't want to return to the office as long as they resign by Feb. 6.

## Year of the Wood Snake

The Lunar New Year begins today, marking the start of the Year of the Wood Snake in the Chinese zodiac. The 15-day celebration, observed by millions across Asian communities worldwide, begins with the new moon and concludes with the Lantern Festival on Feb. 12. China anticipates 9 billion trips during the 40-day travel period, the world's largest annual human migration.

The snake—the sixth animal in the 12-year zodiac cycle—symbolizes wisdom, growth, and transformation. People born in snake years are traditionally regarded as charismatic, intelligent, and creative, but also strategic, mysterious, and stubborn. The wood element adds qualities such as growth, flexibility, and charm. Notable figures born in snake years include Chinese President Xi Jinping, former US President John F. Kennedy, and Taylor Swift.

Holiday traditions emphasize family and good fortune, with customs including red decorations, family reunions, and red envelope gifts.

## Cannabis Study

The largest study on cannabis and its impact on brain function suggests the use of the substance has a statistically significant effect on working memory, per findings released yesterday.

Researchers examined 1,003 individuals ages 22 to 36 using brain imaging technology. Participants were categorized based on their lifetime usage: Heavy users had used cannabis more than 1,000 times, moderate users had used it between 10 and 999 times, and nonusers had used it fewer than 10 times. Results showed 63% of heavy lifetime cannabis users and 68% of recent users experienced reduced brain activity when performing working memory tasks. Working memory allows individuals to retain and manipulate short-term information, such as memorizing directions or solving math problems mentally.

The study further found heavy cannabis use negatively impacted brain regions responsible for decision-making, memory, attention, and emotional processing.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

The "Mona Lisa" to receive dedicated room inside the Louvre in Paris as the world's most-visited museum undergoes a yearslong renovation; the Louvre received 8.7 million visitors in 2024.

Dolly Parton's autobiographical stage musical to debut in Nashville before a planned 2026 release on Broadway.

CNN anchor Jim Acosta to depart after nearly 20 years with the cable news network.

NFL's AFC Championship Game hauls in a record 58 million viewers.

## Science & Technology

US health regulators approve Ozempic to treat chronic kidney disease in diabetic patients; drug is already approved to treat diabetes, with a separate formulation approved for weight loss under the brand name Wegovy.

OpenAI launches ChatGPT Gov, an AI chatbot for government agencies; platform allows use of the company's AI features while still allowing for internal security measures.

Fossil hunter discovers 66-million-year-old vomit; researchers believe the specimen is a regurgitated sea lily, finding sheds light on marine ecosystem during the Cretaceous period.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +1.0%, Dow +0.3%, Nasdaq +2.0%) in recovery rally a day after China's DeepSeek triggered a tech stock sell-off; Nvidia closes up nearly 9%.

Elon Musk's X partners with Visa to offer real-time payment system on the social media platform later this year; users will be able to transfer money from Visa debit cards or bank accounts to X Money accounts hosted on the platform.

JetBlue shares tumble nearly 26% after reporting downbeat Q1 and full-year outlook.

General Motors shares close down 9% amid regulatory volatility despite automaker beating Q4 revenue and earnings expectations.

## Politics & World Affairs

Sen. Gary Peters (D) won't seek third term in 2026, opening battleground seat in Michigan.

Jimmy Patronis and Randy Fine win GOP primaries for US House seats of former Reps. Matt Gaetz (FL-1) and Mike Waltz (FL-6), respectively.

President Donald Trump signs executive order seeking to ban federal funding for youth gender-affirming care.

Mystery drones spotted last year along US East Coast were authorized by the FAA for research and recreational purposes, White House says.

Karoline Leavitt, 27, makes briefing room debut as youngest White House press secretary.

Serbian Prime Minister Milos Vucevic resigns after months long anticorruption protests.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni under investigation over release of Libyan war crimes suspect.



## Governor Rhoden to Announce Lt. Governor Selection

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Larry Rhoden will announce his selection as the 40th Lieutenant Governor of South Dakota. The selection will be announced in a press conference on Wednesday, January 29, 2025, at 10:00 am CT/9:00 am MT in the Mount Rushmore Room of the South Dakota State Capitol.

Yesterday in an address to a joint session of the South Dakota legislature, Governor Rhoden previewed what he is looking for in his Lieutenant Governor selection:

“This individual must be loyal and honest – to me and to the people of South Dakota. My choice for Lieutenant Governor must share my commitment to keep South Dakota strong, safe, and free,” said Governor Rhoden. “He or she must be a strong partner who will provide me with wisdom, counsel, and help steer us in the right direction. And he or she must be ready to take over in the event I am no longer able to serve as Governor – it’s happened before!

“I want to make a selection who recognizes that ‘Under God, the People Rule.’ My lieutenant governor must be worthy of our tremendous people,” continued Governor Rhoden.

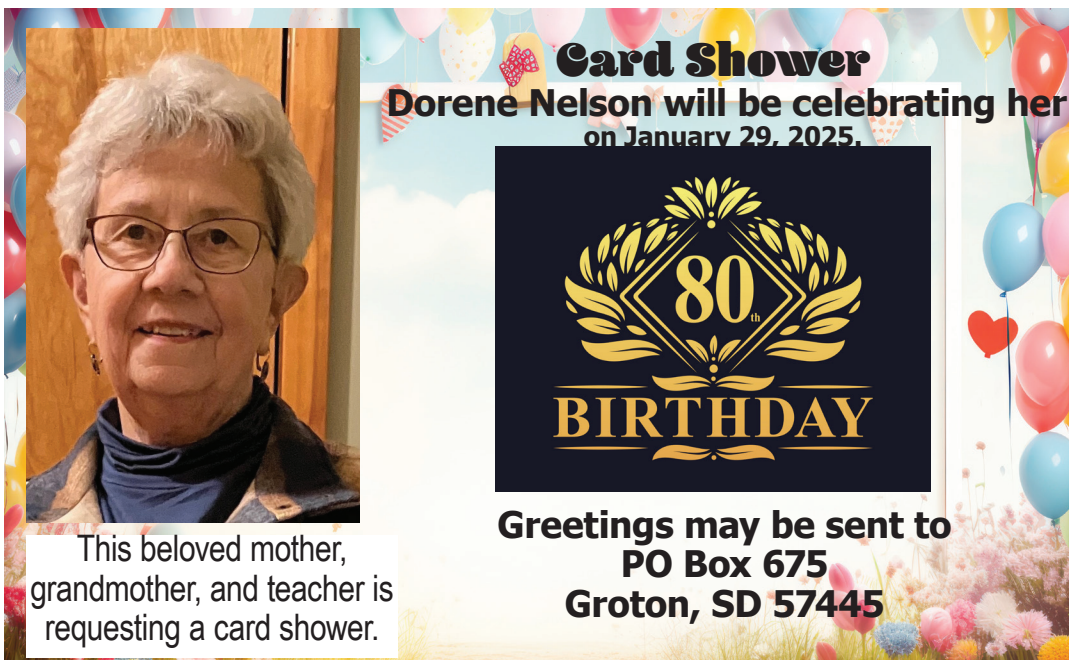


WHAT: Governor Larry Rhoden to announce his selection as the 40th Lieutenant Governor of South Dakota


WHEN: Wednesday, January 29, 2025, at 10:00 am CT/9:00 am MT

WHERE: Mount Rushmore Room, South Dakota State Capitol

LIVESTREAM: SDPB, SD.net, facebook.com/GovLarryRhoden



**Card Shower**  
Dorene Nelson will be celebrating her  
on January 29, 2025.



**80<sup>th</sup>**  
**BIRTHDAY**

Greetings may be sent to  
**PO Box 675**  
**Groton, SD 57445**

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



## Rounds, Thune Introduce Legislation to Rename Pierre Federal Building after Marcella LeBeau

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) and Majority Leader John Thune (R-S.D.) today introduced the Marcella LeBeau Recognition Act to designate the federal office building in Pierre as the “Marcella LeBeau Federal Building.” Born in Promise, LeBeau was a lifelong South Dakotan, a World War II Veteran, a nurse and a well-respected leader in the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and across the state.

“Marcella LeBeau lived an incredible life in service to her tribe, her state and her country,” said Rounds. “She had a true passion for helping others and dedicated her life to not only improving but saving the lives of others. I was honored to be able to meet with Marcella several times over the course of her life, including in 2021 when she flew out to Washington, DC at the age of 101 to meet with me. This legislation would make certain that all who enter the federal building in Pierre will remember her life and legacy.”

“Marcella LeBeau dedicated her life to serving others, from treating wounded soldiers on the front lines at the Battle of the Bulge to working for the Indian Health Service for over three decades,” said Thune. “This legislation will honor her remarkable life and ensure her legacy remains a fixture in our state capital for generations to come.”

This legislation is endorsed by the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and the Great Plains Tribal Chairmen’s Association.

“On behalf of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and the *tióšpaye* (family) of Marcella LeBeau we would like send our sincere gratitude to Senator Rounds for his leadership, thoughtfulness and honor in renaming the Pierre SD federal building after our late matriarch our beloved grandmother Marcella LeBeau *Wígmun̄ke Wašté Wín̄*,” said Ryman LeBeau, Chairman of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and Grandson of Marcella LeBeau.

“Marcella LeBeau was a true hero in World War II, saving our soldiers from death and braving the German Army during the Battle of the Bulge,” said Gay Kingman, Executive Director of the Great Plains Tribal Chairmen’s Association. “She was a leader on healthcare and native rights, and she was the conscience of America. She was a beautiful person who cared deeply about the Sioux nation and all of America.”

### BACKGROUND ON MARCELLA LEBEAU:

Marcella LeBeau, “*Wígmun̄ke Wašté Wín̄*”, was born in 1919 and grew up in Promise, South Dakota as a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe (CRST). She attended boarding school and after graduating from nursing school at St. Mary’s Hospital in Pierre, LeBeau enlisted in the United States Army Nurse Corps in 1943. She served with the Army Nurse Corps’ 76th General Hospital based in Minister, England. As Allied forces retook France and Belgium, she treated injured soldiers from medical tents, sometimes with bombs buzzing overhead.

Following her service in the military, she returned to South Dakota and continued her career as a nurse with the Indian Health Services (IHS). At the time of her retirement, LeBeau was the Director of Nursing for IHS in Eagle Butte. She also served on the CRST Council, becoming a well-established tribal leader. LeBeau was a recipient of the French Legion of Honor Medal and has been inducted into the South Dakota Hall of Fame and the National Native American Hall of Fame. She was a strong advocate for Lakota language, culture and spirituality. She was a lifelong advocate for healing of the Wounded Knee Massacre, which occurred in 1890.



Rounds and LeBeau in 2021

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## Address to Joint Legislative Session

**By: Gov. Larry Rhoden**  
**January 28, 2025**

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, Supreme Court Justices, Constitutional officers, members of the House and Senate, and my fellow South Dakotans:

It is truly an honor to stand before you today as your governor.

Before I begin today, I'd like to say, "thank you," on behalf of our state, to Secretary Kristi Noem. Kristi has served our state for eighteen years – in the State House, in Congress, and as our governor. She worked hard and did great things for our state. And it was my great honor to serve with her. She is helping President Trump make America safe again. We are proud of her and wish her well in that important job. She is still working for us – keeping our nation safe. Please join me in a round of applause to thank Governor Noem.

Today is a new day, and I'm starting out in a new job. It might surprise you to know this: even though I served as lieutenant governor for six years, not everyone knows about the lieutenant governor. I'd like to take some time to share some things you might not know about me.

Most importantly I'd like you to meet my family, many of whom are here today. My son Cody is here with his wife Liz and their two kids, Tally and Josie. My son Tristen is here with his wife Kalen and their daughter Birkin. My sons Jesse and Reggie are here. So is my twin sister Lorie, my brother Dan, and his wife Kathy. And we have many other extended family members here.

My wife Sandy is here today, as well. She and I have been married for almost 44 years. All of us are able to serve because of the support of our loved ones. I wouldn't be standing here today without her constant support and encouragement. Sandy is going to be a great first lady for our state. Please help me welcome Sandy!

My roots are in South Dakota. I was born here, and I will die here.

I'm a fourth-generation South Dakotan. My father's grandfather, Allen Rhoden, came to western South Dakota in 1907. He came to an area in Meade County called Chalkbutte. Union Center, where I live, wasn't founded until 15 or 20 years after that. It was a four- or five-day trip to Sturgis for a load of lumber, so they built a three-room sod house and a sod barn. His son, John, who would be my grandfather, homesteaded two miles southeast of Union Center. My older brother, also named John, is now on that original homestead. My mother was a Murphy. I'm a fifth-generation South Dakotan on her side. Her family came west on horses and wagons. They homesteaded in the Two Rivers area, about 20 miles west of Union Center. Some of the original foundations of my family's homesteads still stand today.

My dad was named Allen after his grandfather. He and my mom, Mildred, raised five kids. My twin sister, Lorie, and I are the fourth and fifth. Mom and Dad taught us the importance of faith in Jesus Christ. And church is still central in my life. They weren't rich by any stretch. But they made sacrifices to send three of us kids to Sunshine Bible Academy near Miller. They wanted our schooling to be centered around our faith and our values.

My parents also taught us the value of work. Hard work is part of life on the ranch. Even today, I'm still

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happiest when I'm working with my hands. It's how I relax. When I get home, I head out to the shop and start welding. I make branding irons, custom tools for ranching, and other things. I like to think about a plan, get it done, and see the fruits of my labor. There's value in working to create something from start to finish.

Work ethic is central to what it means to be a South Dakotan. Work is a gift, not a punishment. We should all treat it that way. I will be asking my Cabinet to review all of our social welfare programs. When we offer services and assistance, we should make sure that we encourage people to work – to earn their own way – if they can. With the passage of Amendment F last November, my Department of Social Services will work with the Trump Administration to get the ball rolling on work requirements for recipients of Medicaid Expansion. Everyone needs a hand-up now and then. But we can't make these programs a way of life. And SD Career Link will be available to these folks to help them find the career of their dreams.

We make and keep South Dakota Strong when we work together. Growing up in rural South Dakota, you also learn about the importance of community. We are rugged and fiercely independent – but we look out for our neighbors. Service is a big part of our lives.

Service in the military has always been a big part of my family. According to my great grandmother's biography, my great-great-great grandfather came to America as aide-de-camp to General Lafayette. He fought in the Revolutionary War. He came with four brothers who all died in the Revolution. My grandfather, John, served in World War I. He fought in the Meuse-Argonne offensive, the largest and deadliest campaign in the history of the United States Army. My dad served in World War II and fought at the Battle of the Bulge. Two of my brothers served in the Army, one of them in Vietnam. That service mentality continues to my kids – My son Cody was a Black Hawk pilot. I'm proud of him for continuing the family legacy and serving our nation.

So when I came of age, I also felt called to serve. I signed up for the South Dakota National Guard and served for six years. As a former Guardsman, it is a great honor to serve as Commander-in-Chief of the South Dakota National Guard.

I've also been active in my community around Union Center – I'm sure that's true for all of you in your own communities. I've been a leader in our church. I served on the board at our local Cenex. For several years, I coached women's softball and boys' basketball. And I still sing bass in a men's quartet.

I served five years on the Meade County school board. In fact, after I got in the Legislature, I said many times that it was the only excuse I could come up with to get off the school board!

We've got quite a few first-time legislators this year, and I know how you feel. I still remember my first year in the State House in 2001. It was Bill Janklow's last two years as governor, and I got to learn from House leaders like Matt Michels and Bill Peterson. My seat was over there where Rep. Keri Weems is sitting today. In fact, I served in the House with her a couple of years later.

When I became majority leader in 2005, I was very intimidated by the long-time appropriations chair, Jim Putnam. He had so much knowledge and experience. But I learned from him, and we became close friends.

I focused on some tough issues as a legislator: property taxes, tax cuts, property rights, protecting the outdoors, and the Second Amendment – a lot of the same issues we'll be talking about this year. My focus has always been to keep South Dakota strong... safe... and free.



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That's my goal as your governor. And I want to work with you towards those goals. I want to keep South Dakota strong – strong families, strong businesses, and strong institutions. We will continue to care for families as they start and grow. That means taking care of both mothers and their children. And it means helping to rebuild families that are struggling. Sandy and I have been proud to work with Stronger Families Together to recruit more foster families across the state. Strong businesses pay strong wages and will help their employees put food on the table. Strong institutions protect our values and our way of life.

I want to keep South Dakota safe – with low crime and respect for law enforcement. My philosophy is that the best way to fight crime is to hire more officers, not to increase penalties. Increasing penalties just means we have to build even more prisons. I will support the Trump Administration's efforts to secure our border. I want our families to feel safe in their homes. I want our kids to be safe playing outside. That's the South Dakota I grew up in – let's keep it that way.

And I want to keep South Dakota free. I am very proud that we are the freest state in a nation built on the principle of freedom. In South Dakota, we trust our people to make their own decisions and lead their lives as they see fit. We proved that this approach works. Freedom led to our strong economy. Freedom led to record visitors and new residents. And freedom will continue to be our calling card as long as I am governor.

I'm working with my Cabinet, my staff, and some legislators on policies to make South Dakota strong, safe, and free. I will be announcing some of those items in the coming days.

I am a common-sense conservative. In fact, I consistently ranked as one of South Dakota's most conservative legislators. I believe that our rights come from God, not from government. Our Creator endowed us with unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – and life comes first. I am pro-life. I'm pro-2nd Amendment. I believe that government is best when it is limited. And I trust our people to exercise their personal freedoms.

I've been involved in plenty of tough debates in this chamber and in the Senate chamber. Serving here, you learn to deal with all kinds of people. In our state legislature, we can have tough debates, even strong disagreements, and still walk out of the building each day as friends. I'm very proud of that fact.

One of the pillars of my administration will be civility. I want South Dakota to show how politics can and should be conducted. My first year here was 24 years ago. When you look back on your time here, ten or twenty years from now, I bet you won't remember bill numbers or votes. But you will remember the people you served with. You will remember the difference that you made in people's lives. So let's pledge to be civil and work with each other.

We have plenty of tough issues to work on this year.

There is a lot of concern about property taxes. That's an issue I've worked on ever since I came to Pierre. I will convene leadership in the House, the Senate, and other interested parties to sit down with me and find solutions.

I'm aware that eminent domain is a hot issue this session. I'm no stranger to this discussion. I've fought for private property rights in this Capitol for over 20 years. In 2006, I was the prime sponsor of legislation that reformed eminent domain in South Dakota (HB 1080). That legislation passed the Senate unanimously and passed the House with only 1 dissenting vote. When we work together and consider all perspectives,

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we can do great work for the people of South Dakota. Extremist environmental policies from Washington are not good for South Dakota – or for our nation. South Dakota must continue to be a state that respects landowners and ag producers. We are the stewards of the land who work day in and day out to put food on the table for us and the world.

I don't just care about farmers and ranchers. I am a rancher. I don't just care about landowners. I am a landowner. And when my time in this office is done, I'll be going back to that ranch.

Until you've worked the land under the scorching heat, carried calves inside through bitter snowstorms in the middle of the night, helped neighbors when the need arises, or have been humbled in times when you yourself needed help, you may not fully understand what it's like to be a steward of the land.

The good Lord has blessed my wife Sandy and me with a ranch – a home that I wouldn't trade for anything. He's blessed us with good health. Most importantly, He's blessed us with a wonderful family.

Our land in South Dakota is a land of opportunity.

When we protect opportunity in South Dakota, we pave the way for better jobs for my children and grandchildren – and yours. Those opportunities might be on the farm and ranch, in a small town, or in a big city. Our kids should be free to pursue their dreams – whether they wear a welding helmet, scrubs, or a suit when they go to work.

To protect opportunity for all, South Dakota must have fair and predictable regulations for business. We shouldn't change the rules in the middle of the game. South Dakota can be open for business, and we can offer a fair shake for every family. We should make sure our young people can stay here and work in a fulfilling career field. If we get this right, we can protect our property rights and provide opportunities for our kids and grandkids.

Every South Dakota student should have the opportunity to get the right education for their needs. Like Governor Noem, I support Leader Odenbach and Leader Mehlhaff's bill to create Education Savings Accounts. And I will work to make sure that neither public schools nor homeschool families are harmed by this initiative.

This year, we are in a tough budget situation, especially when it comes to ongoing money. Governor Noem's budget, like every governor's budget, is a starting point. I will not be offering a separate budget proposal, but I do want to be part of an open budget conversation with you. I know there is concern about some specifics in the budget proposal. I will work with our budget office to try to restore some of those cuts. But we have to remember that, unless our revenue improves, this is a zero-sum game. Budgeting is about priorities. Every dollar we add means a dollar that has to be cut somewhere else.

We can find ways to make government more efficient. Like many of you, I am concerned about the size and scope of the federal government. I fully support President Trump's new Department of Government Efficiency. In South Dakota, we are blessed with a very limited government. But we can always do better. I have directed my Cabinet to review each of their agencies and identify potential efficiencies. I have also asked them to provide me with options to bring to the Trump Administration to make our interactions with the federal government more efficient. The federal government needs to get smaller and let us take care of our own affairs. I trust that President Trump will make that happen.

We also need to take action on the prison. I just walked through the old penitentiary a couple of weeks

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ago, and it needs to go. It's gothic inside. It looks like it hasn't changed in decades. There are rooms with concrete crumbling from the ceiling. We are double-bunking in cells built for one person. I know there are strong feelings about the plan to build a new prison. I want to work through that with you. But this is way overdue. We've had the foresight to set money aside for the new facility. By paying cash, we will avoid hundreds of millions in interest, fees, and debt service payments. This is the year to finish the job.

As a former legislator, I remember how frustrating it could be when communication broke down between the Governor's Office and the legislature. I promise you that I'm not going to let that happen. If you have a question or a concern about something, I'd be happy to try to schedule a meeting. If I can't be available, someone on my Cabinet or staff will be. Let's sit down and talk it out. I can explain where I'm coming from, and I can hear where you're coming from. I want to work with you, not against you. My administration will be open: that includes legislative inquiries and subpoenas.

That goes for the public, as well. And it goes for the press. Another pillar of my administration will be openness and responsiveness. I'm not going to be hard to find. We have the obligation to protect the privacy of individuals, but we also have a responsibility to be open about the operations of government.

In that same spirit of openness, I want to extend a renewed hand to our tribes. A couple weeks ago, Chairman Renville echoed Governor Noem's words, "Today, let's reset. Today, let's rebuild." I could not agree more. We've had our ups and downs over the years, but I am asking our tribal leaders to make a fresh start with me.

Before Governor Noem left office, the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe passed a resolution to welcome her back to the reservation and hung their flag in the Rotunda the next day. This is a great first step to rebuild trust on behalf of all South Dakotans.

You know, it's hard to believe how much things have changed during my time in Pierre. When I first came here, I had a flip phone. To this day, I kind of wish I'd never signed up for texting. My first plan was 25 cents per text. A certain representative named Kristi Noem would periodically send me a text just to run up my bill. All it said was "Cha Ching." I didn't have a keyboard, just the number keys. So replying was a real pain in the neck. Looking back though, that wasn't all bad. It forced me to stop and think before I spoke. That's what you are going to get with me: I'm going to think before I speak; I'm going to be honest and direct – maybe sometimes a little too direct!

There's one more thing I want to talk to you about today. Now that I've moved into the Governor's Office, I must appoint a new lieutenant governor. But I am not going to make that announcement today. I want to make the best possible selection for our state. Here is what I am looking for in the person that I select:

This individual must be loyal and honest – to me and to the people of South Dakota. My choice for Lieutenant Governor must share my commitment to keep South Dakota strong, safe, and free. He or she must be a strong partner who will provide me with wisdom, counsel, and help steer us in the right direction. And he or she must be ready to take over in the event I am no longer able to serve as Governor – it's happened before!

I want to make a selection who recognizes that "Under God, the People Rule." My lieutenant governor must be worthy of our tremendous people.

In closing, it is my great honor to serve as your governor. I would like to make one request of each of you – and of every South Dakotan. Please pray for me and for my family. We all work hard and try to do



our best, but we are nothing without the help of the Good Lord.

I am looking forward to working with you in the Legislature, and to getting out and around the state to hear from our great people. Let's work together this year. Let's keep South Dakota strong, safe, and free.

Thank you. And may God continue to bless the great state of South Dakota.

## Fall River County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash

Where: US Highway 18, mile marker 29, four miles west of Hot Springs, SD

When: 7:18 a.m., Tuesday, January 28, 2025

Driver 1: 47-year-old male from Hot Springs, SD, minor injuries

Vehicle 1: New Holland Farm Tractor 860TL

Driver 2: 38-year-old female from Hot Springs, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 2: 2011 Subaru Outback

Seat belt Used: Yes

Passenger 2a: 10-year-old male from Fall River, SD, serious, non-life-threatening injuries

Seat belt Used: Yes

Passenger 2b: 6-year-old male from Fall River, SD, life-threatening injuries

Seat belt Used: Yes

Fall River County, S.D.- A Hot Springs woman died and two children were injured when their vehicle collided with a farm tractor four miles west of Hot Springs, SD this morning.

The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a New Holland farm tractor was traveling westbound on US Highway 18 near mile marker 29 pulling farm equipment. At the same time, the driver of a 2011 Subaru Outback was approaching the farm vehicle from behind and collided with the rear end of the equipment.

The driver of the Subaru died on scene as a result of her injuries. Two juvenile passengers were buckled in child restraint systems. One sustained life-threatening injuries and the other, serious, non-life-threatening injuries and were transported to a Denver hospital. The driver of the tractor had minor 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.

## South Dakota Association of Rural Water Systems Presents Les Hinds with the 2024 Carroll Anderson Memorial Award

The South Dakota Association of Rural Water Systems is proud to announce Les Hinds with WEB Water Development Association as the recipient of the prestigious 2024 Carroll Anderson Memorial Award. This award, the association's highest honor, recognizes individuals who have made extraordinary contributions to their member systems and to the advancement of rural water systems in South Dakota.

The Carroll Anderson Memorial Award is the highest tribute the association can bestow on an individual for their outstanding voluntary contributions to the advancement of rural community water systems. It pays homage to Carroll Anderson, who, at the time of his death in December 1977, served as Vice-Chairman of both Kingbrook RWS and the South Dakota Association of Rural Water Systems.

Since joining the WEB Water Development Association Board of Directors in 2015, Les Hinds has passionately advocated for rural water. As Board Treasurer since 2017, Les has provided exceptional leadership and financial oversight, ensuring the system's ongoing success and growth. His service extends beyond governance, as he has also been a key member of the WEB Water Scholarship Committee for nine years, helping to create opportunities for future generations.

Les's dedication goes far beyond the boardroom. Known for his larger-than-life personality and hands-on approach, he consistently supports WEB initiatives, embodying the spirit of service and commitment that this award represents. Whether sharing his expertise during meetings or volunteering his time for community projects, Les is a true example of leadership in action.

Drawing on his background as a coach, Les fosters a collaborative and encouraging environment, offering guidance and wisdom to his fellow board members and staff. His ability to inspire teamwork and his unwavering passion for giving back has made him a vital asset to the WEB Water Development Association and a respected figure in the rural water community.

The South Dakota Association of Rural Water Systems is proud to recognize Les Hinds for his exceptional contributions and unwavering dedication to advancing rural water systems in South Dakota.

About the South Dakota Association of Rural Water Systems (SDARWS): The SDARWS is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to enhancing South Dakota's water and wastewater industries. Through training, on-site technical assistance, and the Annual Technical Conference, SDARWS supports rural and municipal water and wastewater systems in operations, management, boardsmanship, and governance. The organization is financially supported by its membership dues and grant programs, embodying a member-driven approach.



**Les Hinds**

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## Groton February Calendar of Events

### Saturday, Feb. 1

Groton Invitational Wrestling Tournament, 10 a.m., boys and girls

Boys Basketball at DAK XII/NEC Clash at Madison: Groton Area vs. Dell Rapids, 5 p.m., auxiliary gym

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

### Sunday, Feb. 2

#### GROUNDHOG DAY

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

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

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

Open Gym, 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Pancake Sunday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Groton Community Center

### Monday, Feb. 3

Senior Menu: Sloppy joe on bun, oven roasted potatoes, winter blend, ice cream, fruit.

Girls Basketball at Florence: C game at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow

Junior High Boys Basketball at Sisseton: 7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.

Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Groton Community Center

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

### Tuesday, Feb. 4

Senior Menu: Cheese tortellini alfredo with diced chicken, green beans, Mandarin oranges, breadstick.

Boys basketball at Aberdeen Roncalli: C game at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow. At Elementary school, 8th at 4 p.m., 7th at 5 p.m.

JH wrestling at Britton-Hecla, 5 p.m.

Common Cents Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., 209 N Main.

Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., Groton Community Center

Groton United Methodist Bible Study, 10 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Ladies Aid LWML, 1:30 p.m.

### Wednesday, Feb. 5

Senior Menu: Swiss steak, mashed potato with gravy, peas and carrots, apricots, whole wheat bread.

Groton Chamber Board Meeting, 6 p.m., at City Hall

Groton United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.

### Thursday, Feb. 6

Senior Menu: BBQ Chicken, rice pilaf, mixed vegetables, pineapple, whole wheat bread.

Basketball doubleheader hosts Deuel. Girls JV at 4 p.m., boys JV at 5 p.m., girls varsity and boys varsity to follow.

Groton United Methodist: Caring Team Meeting, 5 p.m.

### Friday, Feb. 7

Senior Menu: Scalloped potato with ham, beets, fruited Jell-O, whole wheat bread.

Girls Wrestling at Yankton, 9 a.m.

Boys Basketball at Vermillion: C game at 4 p.m., JV at 5 p.m., varsity to follow.

JH Boys Basketball at Waubay, 7th grade only, 4:30 p.m.

Boys Wrestling at Lyman, 6 p.m.

### Saturday, Feb. 8

Girls Basketball at DAK XII/NEC Clash at Madison. Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 209 N Main

### Sunday, Feb. 9

#### SUPER BOWL SUNDAY

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion/milestones/Souper Bowl of Caring, 9 a.m.; Sunday



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School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.

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

## Monday, Feb. 10

Senior Menu: Hamburger gravy, mashed potato, green beans, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.

Junior High Boys Basketball at Britton-Hecla, 7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.

Girls Basketball at Great Plains Lutheran: C at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow.

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Groton Community Center

Groton United Methodist: PEO Meeting, 7 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

## Tuesday, February. 11

Senior Menu: Ham, au gratin, broccoli, pineapple, whole wheat bread.

Boys Basketball hosts Leola-Frederick: JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow.

Common Cents Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., 209 N Main.

Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., Groton Community Center

Groton United Methodist Bible Study, 10 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: council, 6 p.m.

## Wednesday, Feb. 12

Senior Menu: Chicken tetrazzine, mixed vegetables, accini depepi salad, whole wheat bread.

Groton United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.

## Thursday, Feb. 13

Senior Menu: Lemon baked fish, rice, California blend, peach crips, whole wheat bread.

Parent-Teacher Conferences, 1:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Early dismissal of school.

Groton Lions Club meeting, 6 p.m., 104 N Main  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

## Friday, Feb. 14

VALENTINE'S DAY

Senior Menu: Baked pork chop, wild rice, glazed carrots, cheesecake with frost glaze, dinner roll.

No School, Faculty In-service

Community Blood Drive, 8:45 a.m. to noon, Groton Community Center

## Saturday, Feb. 15

Basketball Double-Header at Moberg-Pollock. Boys 8th at 11 a.m., boys 7th at noon, girls C at 11 a.m., boys C at noon, girls varsity and boys varsity to follow.

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

## Sunday, Feb. 16

Open gym, 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Junior High State Wrestling at Pierre.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.; No Sunday School.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; No Sunday School; Choir, 6 p.m.

United Methodist: Conde, 8:15 a.m.; Groton, 9:30 a.m.; Britton, 11:15 a.m.; No Sunday School; Coffee Hour, 10:30 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.;

## Monday, Feb. 17

PRESIDENT'S DAY - No School

National FFA Week

Boys Basketball hosts Florence-Henry: C game at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow; in gym: boys 8th at 4 p.m., boys 7th at 5 p.m.

Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Groton Community Center

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.

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## Tuesday, Feb. 18

Senior Menu: Ranch chicken, sweet potato, Monterey blend, oranges, whole wheat bread.

Common Cents Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., 209 N Main.

Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., Groton Community Center  
Groton United Methodist Bible Sutting, 10 a.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.

## Wednesday, Feb. 19

Senior Menu: Chesseburger casserole, brussel sprouts, fruit, bread stick.

Groton United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.

Groton United Methodist: Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.

## Thursday, Feb. 20

Senior Menu: Turkey, mashed potato with gravy, carrots, mixed fruit, dinner roll.

Junior High Boys Basketball at Warner: 7th at 6 p.m., 8th at 7 p.m.

## Friday, Feb. 21

Senior Menu: Taco salad, Mexican rice with beans, breadstick, fruit.

Basketball Double Header at Britton-Hecla: Girls C/Boys C at 4 p.m.; Girls JV/Boys JV at 5 p.m., followed by girls varsity and boys varsity.

## Saturday, Feb. 22

Girls Region Wrestling at Clark.

Boys Region Wrestling at Hamlin, 10 a.m.

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

## Sunday, Feb. 23

Open Gym, 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

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

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

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

## Monday, Feb. 24

Senior Menu: Hot pork sandwich, scalloped potato, corn, fruit cocktail.

Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Groton Community Center

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

## Tuesday, Feb. 25

Senior Menu: Meatballs, mashed potato with gravy, Italian blend, peaches, whole wheat bread.

Region 1A Girls B basketball tournament

Common Cents Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., 209 N Main.

Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., Groton Community Center  
Groton United Methodist Bible Sutting, 10 a.m.

## Wednesday, Feb. 26

Senior Menu: Beef noodle stroganoff, capri blend, apple sauce, cookie, whole wheat bread.

Groton United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.

## Thursday, Feb. 27

Senior Menu: Potato soup, chicken salad sandwich, mixed vegetables, fruit, whole wheat bread.

Girls and boys state wrestling at Rapid City

Region 1A Girls B basketball tournament

## Friday, Feb. 28

Senior Menu: Spanish rice with hamburger, green beans, vanilla pudding with oranges, whole wheat bread.

Groton FFA CDE

Girls and boys state wrestling at Rapid City

Boys Basketball vs. Aberdeen Christian at the Aberdeen Civic Arena: 7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow.

## Saturday, March 1

Girls and boys state wrestling at Rapid City

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

## The Life of Sandra Oliver



Sandra Jeanne Oliver, 83 of Sioux Falls, SD (formerly of Groton, SD) passed away on Tuesday, January 14, 2025 at the Dougherty Hospice House in Sioux Falls, SD.

A Mass of Christian Burial and celebration will be held at 1:00 p.m., on Saturday, February 22nd at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church in Groton, SD. Father Gregory Tschakert will officiate. A time of sharing and fellowship will be held in the church hall after the service. Inurnment will follow in the spring under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel of Groton, SD.

Sandy was born on June 10, 1941 to Zenos and Jeanne (Cope) Hanson in Watertown, SD. She attended school in Watertown, SD and Colorado Springs, SD. She graduated in 1959. Sandy then attended Northern State University in Aberdeen, SD for her teaching degree. On April 18, 1961, Sandy and Richard 'Dick' Oliver were united in Holy Matrimony. To this union three daughters were born; Becky, Lynn and Cindy. Sandy spent 33 years teaching for the Groton, SD School District. Dick and Sandy Oliver were proud farmers in Brown County, SD for all of their married life.

Sandy loved her family deeply and had great concern for all of them. She enjoyed attending all of the family's activities.

Sandy is survived by her three daughters: Rebecca and Berk Hong of Huntington Beach, CA Lynn Lutter-Tabbert and Mike Tabbert of Sioux Falls, SD Cindy and Carl Teer of Harrisburg, SD; Six grandchildren: Jared Hong, Julia and Jake Carnegie, John Dylan and Sonya Lutter, Joseph Roy and Sarah Lutter, Jesse and Lauren Miller, Isaiah Teer; and nine great-grandchildren. Sandy is also survived by two sisters: Judy Carpenter, Pam Kirschman; two sisters-in-law: Maggie Oliver, Bette Cochran; two brothers-in-law: Kory Kirschman, John Cochran along with numerous nieces and nephews.

Sandy is preceded in death by her husband of 49 years, Dick, her parents: Zenos and Jeanne Hanson, Robert and Imo Jeanne Oliver, brothers-in-Law: Ron Carpenter, Robert J (Jack) Oliver and an infant grandson, Ross Joseph Lutter.

Memorials may be directed to the charity of your choice.

## Death Notice: Jerry and Janet Stoffers

Jerry Lee Stoffers, 83, of Hecla passed away January 25, 2025 in Groton. Janet Rae Stoffers, 83, of Hecla passed away January 27, 2025 at Avantara Groton. Services are planned through Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel for the spring with inurnment in Detroit Cemetery.

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## Highway 12 Showdown: Roncalli Triumphs Over Groton in Defensive Battle

GROTON - The battle of Brown County teams along U.S. Highway 12 turned into a defensive slugfest Tuesday night, with the Aberdeen Roncalli Cavaliers using a dominant first quarter to claim a 38-26 road victory over the Groton Area Tigers.

### A Fast Start for Roncalli

Groton started strong, taking an early 2-0 lead. However, Roncalli responded with a relentless 19-0 run that silenced the home crowd and set the tone for the game. By the end of the first quarter, the Cavaliers had built a commanding 19-4 advantage.

Roncalli continued their defensive pressure in the second quarter, limiting Groton's offensive opportunities and extending their lead to 27-9 by halftime. Ava Hanson led the Cavaliers' attack with 12 points, while Riley Boulder added 11 to keep Roncalli firmly in control.

### A Defensive Third Quarter

Coming out of halftime, both teams struggled to find the basket. The defenses tightened, and nearly five minutes passed before either team scored in the third quarter. Roncalli maintained a 34-13 lead going into the final period.

Despite the deficit, the Tigers refused to back down. Hanson continued to lead Groton, finishing with three three-pointers and a game-high 13 points. Rylee Dunker battled hard inside, contributing six points and pulling down six rebounds.

### Too Little, Too Late for Groton

Groton showed signs of life in the fourth quarter, outscoring Roncalli 13-4 in a late push, but the early hole proved too deep to escape. Roncalli's efficiency at the free-throw line (8-of-11 for 73%) helped them maintain their lead, while Groton's struggles from beyond the arc (3-of-22 for 14%) made a comeback difficult.

Defensively, Taryn Traphagen made her presence known with two blocks, while Dunker added another. The Tigers also recorded eight steals, showing their defensive effort never wavered.

### Moving Forward

With the win, Roncalli improved to 9-2 on the season, while Groton fell to 9-4. Both teams remain strong contenders in the region, and if Tuesday's game was any indication, a potential rematch would be another intense battle.

As the season progresses, both teams will look to build off this game in their pursuit of postseason success. But for now, the latest Highway 12 clash belongs to the Cavaliers. Groton Area hosts Webster on Friday with a C game starting at 5 p.m.

- Story compiled by ChatGPT

#### Groton Area

Kennedy Hansen: 13 points, 3 rebounds, 3 fouls.

Rylee Dunker: 6 points, 6 rebounds, 4 steals, 2 fouls, 1 block.

Laila Roberts: 4 points, 3 rebounds, 2 steals, 2 fouls.

Chesney Weber: 2 points, 1 assist, 1 steal.

Taryn Traphagen: 1 point, 2 rebounds, 1 assist, 2 blocks.

Jerica Locke: 6 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 foul.

Jaedyn Penning: 5 rebounds, 1 steal, 4 fouls.

Brooklyn Hansen: 1 rebound.

Faith Traphagen: 2 rebounds, 1 assist, 3 fouls.

2-pointers: 7-19 37%, 3-pointers: 3-22 14%, Free Throws: 3-7 43%, 28 rebounds, 16 turnovers, 4 assists, 8 steals, 15 fouls, 3 blocks.

Roncalli: Ava Hanson 12, Rylee Voeller 11, Gabby Thomas 6, Maddie Huber 3, Claire Crawford 3, McKenna O'Keefe 2, Morgan Helms 2. Field Goals: 12-40 30%, Free Throws: 8-11 73%, 12 fouls and 8 turnovers.



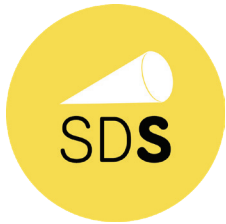
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The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Agtegra, Avantara Groton, Bierman Farm Service, BK Custom T's & More, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Dan Richardt from Groton Ford, Farmers Union Co-op of Ferney and Conde, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Lanes & Lounge, Locke Electric, Krueger Brothers, R&M Farms/Rix Farms, The Meathouse in Andover. Shane Clark provided the play-by-play while Jeslyn Kosel ran the camera and Paul Kosel did technology and stats.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 28-17. David and Tammy Dohman sponsored the broadcast on GDILIVE.COM. Kela. Tracy led Groton Area with 11 points followed by Chesney Weber with 9, Talli Wright 4, and McKenna Tietz and Makenna Krause each had two points.

Roncalli was led by Karsyn Davis and Olivia Dix with six points apiece while Grace Cogley had 3 and Gabby Thomas 2.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### SD Senate narrowly advances bill requiring posting and teaching of Ten Commandments in schools

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 28, 2025 6:19 PM

PIERRE — The South Dakota Senate voted 18-17 on Tuesday at the Capitol to advance a bill mandating public schools to display the Ten Commandments in every classroom and teach their historical significance.

The bill now heads to the state House of Representatives.

Sen. John Carley, R-Piedmont, proposed the legislation.

"These are historical principles that have been used in the tradition and founding of America," Carley said.

Opponents characterized the bill as a violation of the federal First Amendment constitutional principle of separation of church and state, and as a burdensome, unnecessary mandate.

Sen. Jamie Smith, D-Sioux Falls, a former public school teacher, said schools already have the option to display the commandments. They are also required to display the national motto, "In God We Trust," due to state legislation adopted six years ago.

"I'm sitting here in a room full of people that believe in smaller government, less government," Smith said, referring to the Republican-dominated state Senate. "And we're making a mandate."

The bill would require 8-by-14-inch posters with "easily readable font." Schools would have to additionally display a three-part, roughly 225-word statement near the posters containing information about the commandments' historical significance.

The legislation would replace 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



**State Sen. John Carley, R-Piedmont, foreground, listens on Jan. 28, 2025, in the South Dakota Senate as Sen. Red Dawn Foster, D-Pine Ridge, speaks about Carley's bill that would require the Ten Commandments to be taught and displayed in public schools.** (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

civilization.”

Carley said displaying and teaching the commandments would instill a moral grounding in students.

He pointed to a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*, which he said upheld public religious displays rooted in tradition. The ruling upheld a football coach’s post-game prayer as protected free speech and religious expression, emphasizing it was personal, voluntary and non-coercive.

Sen. Lauren Nelson, R-Yankton, said the South Dakota bill is not coercive.

“It’s not about forcing people to believe a certain way, but about understanding where we came from as a country,” Nelson said.

Sen. Red Dawn Foster, D-Pine Ridge, unsuccessfully proposed an amendment that would have allowed schools to substitute a list of Native American values for the commandments.

She said many Native Americans view the bill as perpetuating the historical policies of federal boarding schools, where Indigenous children were forced to speak English, convert to Christianity and forsake their own cultural practices.

Carley replied that he didn’t see any documentation that the list of Native American values proposed for inclusion by Foster had an “influence on the foundation of America.”

Sen. David Wheeler, R-Huron, is a lawyer. He raised the specter of lawsuits, pointing to ongoing litigation against a similar law in Louisiana. That state became the first to enact a law requiring the Ten Commandments to be displayed in classrooms.

“It’s a guaranteed lawsuit,” Wheeler said.

Wheeler did not vote in favor of the bill, but he did convince senators to add an amendment that would require the state attorney general to defend any lawsuits arising from the legislation at the state’s expense, rather than burdening local school districts.

*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.*

## Rhoden commits to new prison and school choice in first speech as governor

### Newly sworn-in chief executive also talks eminent domain for carbon pipelines but doesn’t reveal his position

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JANUARY 28, 2025 4:24 PM**

South Dakota Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden didn’t unveil any new proposals in his first gubernatorial address to state lawmakers Tuesday at the Capitol in Pierre, but he stressed key parts of his predecessor’s agenda that he’ll support, including building a new prison and establishing an education savings account program.

Meanwhile, he was less clear about his position on eminent domain for carbon dioxide pipelines, one of the biggest issues this legislative session.

Rhoden, the state’s 34th governor, will serve the remaining two years of former Gov. Kristi Noem’s second term. She resigned Saturday as the U.S. Senate confirmed her nomination to lead the federal Department of Homeland Security, and Rhoden was formally sworn in Monday.

“My focus has always been to keep South Dakota strong, safe and free,” Rhoden said. “That’s my goal as your governor.”



**South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden speaks to lawmakers during a joint session of the Legislature on Jan. 28, 2025.** (Dave Bordewyk/South Dakota NewsMedia Association)

## Eminent domain

Rhoden told lawmakers he's fought for private property rights in the state and helped reform eminent domain laws in 2006 while he was a legislator.

Carbon capture pipelines are eligible for federal tax credits intended to incentivize the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions that warm the climate. Rhoden told lawmakers he opposes federal "extremist environmental policies," but he also said South Dakota must have "fair and predictable regulations" for businesses and that lawmakers shouldn't "change the rules in the middle of the game."

A bill that would ban the use of eminent domain for carbon dioxide pipelines passed the state House on Monday. Rhoden did not say whether he supports or opposes the legislation.

The bill would impact the proposed \$9 billion Summit Carbon Solutions pipeline, which aims to

transport some of the CO<sub>2</sub> emitted by 57 ethanol plants in five states, including eastern South Dakota, to an underground storage site in North Dakota.

"South Dakota can be open for business, and we can offer a fair shake for every family. We should make sure our young people can stay here and work in a fulfilling career field," Rhoden said. "If we get this right, we can protect our property rights and provide opportunities for our kids and grandkids."

Rhoden's apparent call for compromise echoed the approach last legislative session's Republican leaders took, when they shepherded bills into law that implemented new protections for landowners and counties affected by carbon pipelines but did not ban the use of eminent domain. That effort led to a voter backlash, with 11 Republican incumbent legislators losing during the June primary election after they supported the package, and one of the bills going down to defeat in November after petitioners referred it to the ballot.

## New administration, new focus

Rhoden told lawmakers his administration will announce new policies in the coming days, as well as a lieutenant governor nomination on Wednesday, which will be subject to confirmation by the Legislature. He also told lawmakers that his office will work to restore some cuts Noem recommended in her budget, though he did say which ones.

While planning to restore some proposed cuts, he'll look for other "potential efficiencies" in state agencies. Rhoden told lawmakers he considers himself a "common-sense conservative" and believes in limited government.

He said his Cabinet will review the state's social welfare programs to encourage people to work if able, adding that his administration will work with President Donald Trump to enforce work requirements for Medicaid expansion recipients. South Dakota voters approved a ballot measure in November authorizing the state to pursue those work requirements.

## Noem's agenda lingers

Lawmakers need to take action on building a new men's prison, Rhoden said. He called the current penitentiary in Sioux Falls, with some parts of the facility dating back to 1881, "gothic" and said it has "concrete crumbling from the ceiling" in some rooms.

He wants to work through differences of opinion about building a new prison, but he said the project



is "way overdue." The state has faced opposition from landowners near the prison's planned site, about 15 miles south of Sioux Falls. Over the past several years, legislators have set aside much of the project's anticipated \$825 million cost.

"This is the year to finish the job," Rhoden said.

The former Sunshine Bible Academy student also pledged support for Noem's education savings account proposal. The \$4 million program would provide private-school, homeschool or other alternative-instruction students with up to \$3,000 apiece in public funds to support their private education.

Regarding property tax reform, which some legislators have been promoting for several years, Rhoden told lawmakers he plans to meet with legislative leadership to find solutions. Three property tax reform bills have been introduced so far this session, including a plan to reduce property taxes by increasing the state sales tax rate.

### Improved relationships and communication

Rhoden promised lawmakers, the public, Native American tribes and the press that his administration will be open and communicate clearly. He'll think before he speaks, he said, and will be honest and direct — but he promised civility as well.

"I want South Dakota to show how politics can and should be conducted," Rhoden said.

Rhoden also took the time to share his background and values with legislators. The 65-year-old fourth-generation rancher from rural Union Center shared the importance of his faith and family, as well as the impact his ranch and his welding work has on his beliefs.

When his time in office is done, Rhoden said, he'll return to his ranch. He did not say whether he'll run for election as governor in 2026, and he declined to answer that question from the media during his swearing-in ceremony Monday.

"My roots are in South Dakota," Rhoden said. "I was born here, and I will die here."

*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.*

## Noem labels immigrants as 'dirt bags,' pledges support to Homeland Security staff

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JANUARY 28, 2025 4:08 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem Tuesday addressed some of her staff, promising to provide resources and support as the agency fulfills its duties, one of them carrying out President Donald Trump's plan to deport masses of undocumented people.

Earlier in the day, Noem, the former governor of South Dakota, was in New York City, accompanying U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents in arrests across the city. In a video posted to social media, Noem — clad in a vest labeled POLICE/ICE — said she was in the city "to get the dirt bags off our streets."

The visit to New York followed a weekend of highly publicized immigration enforcement, where ICE officials announced they arrested nearly 1,000 people in the country without legal authorization. However, an arrest does not mean an immigrant has been detained or in deportation proceedings and ICE has not specified details of those arrests.

Before Noem addressed DHS workforce, as she walked up to the lectern, the song "Hot Mama" by country singer Trace Adkins, played in the background, with the chorus "One hot mama, you turn me on, let's turn it up and turn this room into a sauna."

It was reminiscent of a March 2024 appearance by Noem with Trump at an Ohio campaign rally at which



**U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem delivers remarks to staff at the Department of Homeland Security headquarters on Jan. 28, 2025 in Washington, D.C.** (Photo

by Manuel Balce Ceneta-Pool/Getty Images)

he called her “a very special woman who’s hot as a politician” and “beautiful.” Noem at the time was considered a potential running mate for Trump, who later chose J.D. Vance, then a Republican senator from Ohio.

Noem told staff that she aims to provide them the resources to carry out their mission and that her vision for the agency stems from a story from her childhood.

When she was 10, building a fence with her dad, he asked her for a tool that was in the truck. When she ran to the truck to get it for him, he told her, “You should know what I need, before I know what I need.”

“What he was doing was teaching us to think ahead,” she said. “That is what our job is as well here at the Department of Homeland Security. We prepare ahead and think three steps ahead so that people have what they need before

they need it.”

Noem, whom the U.S. Senate confirmed on Saturday, will lead one of the federal government’s largest departments, with a staff of roughly 260,000 employees and a budget around \$100 billion.

DHS responsibilities include border protection, disaster response, global threats, cyber and airline security and the U.S. Secret Service, among other duties.

In her address, Noem added that she specifically asked Trump to lead DHS because it is the president’s “number one priority.”

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

## **Anna Paulina Luna files legislation to carve Trump’s face on Mount Rushmore**

**BY: MITCH PERRY - JANUARY 28, 2025 8:23 PM**

Florida Republican U.S. Rep. Anna Paulina Luna has filed legislation that would direct the secretary of the Interior to carve the figure of President Donald Trump on Mount Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota.

In a press release, Luna, first elected in 2022 and reelected last November, said the bill aims to honor Trump “for his transformative impact on America and the historical significance of his leadership.”

“President Trump’s bold leadership and steadfast dedication to America’s greatness have cemented his place in history. Mount Rushmore, a timeless symbol of our nation’s freedom and strength, deserves to reflect his towering legacy — a legacy further solidified by the powerful start to his second term,” Luna said. “He will be forever remembered among the great like Presidents George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt.”

In a 2020 tweet, Trump denied a report that the White House had reached out to then-South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem about carving his face on Mount Rushmore, although he did add that it “sounds like a

good idea to me!”

Noem, who was confirmed as Trump’s Homeland Security secretary on Saturday, gave Trump a bust of Mount Rushmore that included his face in 2020 when she was still governor.

*Mitch Perry has covered politics and government in Florida for more than two decades. Most recently he is the former politics reporter for Bay News 9. He has also worked at Florida Politics, Creative Loafing and WMNF Radio in Tampa. He was also part of the original staff when the Florida Phoenix was created in 2018. Florida Phoenix is part of States Newsroom, the nation’s largest state-focused nonprofit news organization.*



**Mount Rushmore National Memorial.** (Courtesy of National Park Service)

## U.S. Senate GOP blocks resolution condemning Trump pardons of Jan. 6 attackers

**BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JANUARY 28, 2025 6:02 PM**

WASHINGTON — U.S. Senate Republicans Tuesday blocked a resolution condemning pardons for supporters of President Donald Trump who violently attacked and injured police officers when they broke into the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

Democratic Sen. Patty Murray requested unanimous consent for the resolution on the floor but was met with opposition from Majority Whip John Barrasso.

Unanimous consent is a common route senators take for simple resolutions, military nominations and other actions, but adoption can be blocked by just one senator.

Hours after his Jan. 20 inauguration, Trump commuted the prison sentences for 14 of the most serious offenders on Jan. 6, including leaders of the paramilitary groups the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys. Simultaneously he granted a “full, complete and unconditional pardon” to the rest of the approximately 1,560 defendants.

Murray, who represents Washington state, said Trump’s decision to pardon the violent defendants is “truly an unthinkable attempt to erase the facts of that day.”

“It is a betrayal of the law enforcement that protected all of us that day and a dangerous endorsement of political violence, telling criminals that you can beat cops within an inch of their lives as long as it’s in service to Donald Trump,” Murray said.

All 47 Democratic and independent senators co-sponsored the 19-word resolution that “disapproves of any pardons for individuals who were found guilty of assaulting Capitol Police officers.”

### **Biden also issued pardons**

Barrasso, a Wyoming Republican, blocked the measure. He argued that “Democrats do not want a serious debate here about the use of presidential pardon power” because former President Joe Biden had granted thousands of pardons and commutations before leaving office.

“If they did want a serious conversation, they would talk about Joe Biden’s pardons, over 8,000 of them,” Barrasso said. “The previous president used his final days in office to grant clemency to 37 of 40 of the worst killers on death row.”



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**U.S. Senate Republicans on Jan. 28, 2025, blocked a resolution condemning pardons for supporters of President Donald Trump who violently attacked and injured police officers when they broke into the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. Shown are some Trump supporters that day.** (Photo by Brent Stirton/Getty Images)

Biden set the record for the most pardons and commutations, granting clemency to thousands of nonviolent drug offenders. The former president, whose opposition to capital punishment is well documented, commuted the death sentences for 37 federal inmates, who will now serve life sentences instead. He left three inmates on death row.

Just before leaving the White House, Biden granted preemptive pardons to all members who sat on the congressional committee to investigate the Jan. 6 attack, as well as the four police officers who testified before the panel.

He also preemptively pardoned Dr. Anthony Fauci and retired Gen. Mark Milley, both of whom have been the target of Trump's threats for retribution and threats from the general public.

Biden drew criticism in early December for pardoning his son, Hunter, who was convicted on federal gun charges and pleaded guilty to tax violations. In his final moments in office, Biden granted preemptive pardons to five members of his family.

## Assaults on police

Over 140 U.S. Capitol Police and Washington Metropolitan Police officers were injured that day, according to the Department of Justice.

Several other Democratic senators spoke on the floor about specific assaults on law enforcement on Jan. 6, and the four officers who died by suicide in the days following the attack.

"How does this line up with backing the blue? I don't get it," said Sen. Mark Kelly of Arizona.

States Newsroom approached nearly two dozen Republican senators the day after Trump issued the pardons for comment about clemency for the violent offenders.

With just a few exceptions, nearly all either refused to talk, deflected to criticize Biden's pardons or said they hadn't read Trump's 334-word order to free the defendants from their punishments.

Of all the defendants, 608 were charged with assaulting, resisting or impeding law enforcement, including 174 charged with using a deadly or dangerous weapon or causing serious bodily injury to an officer. Nearly a third pleaded guilty to assaulting law enforcement, and 69 pleaded guilty to doing so with a blatant or improvised weapon, including pieces of furniture the rioters destroyed inside the Capitol and police officers' own riot shields.

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



## Trump issues order prohibiting openly transgender service members in the military

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JANUARY 28, 2025 11:38 AM

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump signed orders late Monday banning openly transgender service members from the U.S. military and suppressing any diversity initiatives, including prohibiting “un-American” concepts from military educational institutions.

An executive order published just before 11 p.m. Eastern under the title “Prioritizing Military Excellence and Readiness” expressly forbids from the armed services individuals diagnosed with gender dysphoria, widely recognized by medical professionals as the incongruence between a person’s sex at birth and experienced gender.

The new policy, which revokes a 2021 Biden administration order allowing transgender people to serve, cites “medical, surgical, and mental health constraints,” as well as character, as reasons to prohibit the specific population’s service.

According to the order: “Beyond the hormonal and surgical medical interventions involved, adoption of a gender identity inconsistent with an individual’s sex conflicts with a soldier’s commitment to an honorable, truthful, and disciplined lifestyle, even in one’s personal life. A man’s assertion that he is a woman, and his requirement that others honor this falsehood, is not consistent with the humility and selflessness required of a service member.”

Former President Joe Biden’s 2021 policy reversed Trump’s 2018 order banning openly trans military service members. A 2019 U.S. Supreme Court decision temporarily upheld Trump’s ban.



**An aerial view of the the Pentagon, May 12, 2021.** (Photo by Air Force

Tech. Sgt. Brittany A. Chase/Department of Defense)

### Hegseth issuing directives

Trump on Monday night directed newly installed Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth to “promptly issue directives for DoD to end invented and identification-based pronoun usage” and update department medical standards within 60 days.

The Pentagon referred all inquiries to the Defense Health Agency. The agency said Tuesday it needed more time to provide information on current statistics of transgender members of the military and health care costs.

According to a 2018 report from the Palm Center, 8,980 transgender active duty troops and 5,727 reservists served in the U.S. armed forces at the time. The California-based think tank that studied LGBTQ+ bans in the military operated from 1998 to 2022.

A Military.com report in 2021 found that from Jan. 1, 2016 to May 14, 2021, the Defense Department spent \$11.58 million on psychotherapy for service members with gender dysphoria. During that time, 637

service members received hormone therapy that totaled \$340,000, and 243 received surgery at the cost of \$3.1 million, according to the report.

Overall discretionary defense spending in 2021 totaled \$742 billion, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

## Criticism of order

Numerous advocacy groups denounced Trump's order.

SPARTA Pride, a group of transgender current and former service members, issued a statement Tuesday defending thousands of transgender troops who "currently fill critical roles in combat arms, aviation, nuclear engineering, law enforcement, and military intelligence, many requiring years of specialized training and expertise. Transgender troops have deployed to combat zones, served in high-stakes missions, and demonstrated their ability to strengthen unit cohesion and morale."

The statement continues, "While some transgender troops do have surgery, the recovery time and cost is minimal, and is scheduled so as not to impact deployments or mission readiness (all of which is similar to a non-emergent minor knee surgery). The readiness and physical capabilities of transgender service members is not different from that of other service members."

Members of the Congressional Equality Caucus described Trump's order as "beyond shameful."

"Our military has invested millions of dollars into training these brave Americans who signed up to serve their nation. Now, despite their sacrifices, President Trump is unlawfully and unconstitutionally calling for them to be kicked to the curb simply because he doesn't like who they are," caucus chair Rep. Mark Takano, a California Democrat, said in a statement Tuesday.

## Abolishing DEI offices

Under an additional directive Monday night, the president ordered Hegseth and new Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem to "abolish every DEI office" within their departments and any "vestiges of DEI offices, such as sub-offices, programs, elements, or initiatives established to promote a race-based preferences system that subverts meritocracy, perpetuates unconstitutional discrimination, and promotes divisive concepts or gender ideology."

DEI is shorthand for diversity, equity and inclusion. The Trump administration titled the executive order "Restoring America's Fighting Force."

Hegseth and Noem have 30 days to issue guidance on closing the offices and halting prohibited activities. They must report back to the White House on their progress in 180 days.

Among the initiatives that must cease, according to the order, are the teaching or promoting of any "divisive concepts" of race or sex at armed forces educational institutions, among other topics the order describes as "un-American."

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

## Judge temporarily blocks Trump administration freeze on broad swath of federal payments

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JANUARY 28, 2025 10:05 AM

WASHINGTON — A federal district judge ruled Tuesday the Trump administration must wait until at least next week before it can move forward with pausing federal spending on trillions in grants and loans, though she emphasized the short-term administrative stay might not continue after a Feb. 3 hearing.

District Judge Loren L. AliKhan's decision temporarily blocks the Office of Management and Budget from moving forward with plans to stop payments on multiple federal programs, which it announced late Monday.



The two-page memo from the Office of Management and Budget announcing the freeze led to significant confusion throughout the day Tuesday among members of Congress — including Republicans — about what programs were affected and frustration the White House appeared to be eroding lawmakers' constitutional spending authority.

AliKhan's ruling came less than 24 hours after news first broke of the Trump administration's planned action.

AliKhan said after hearing arguments from an attorney for the organizations that filed the lawsuit earlier Tuesday and an attorney representing the federal government that "anything that was due to be paused as of 5 p.m. today to open funding on grants is stayed."

AliKhan, who was appointed to the bench by former President Joe Biden, added that any funding impacted by separate executive orders is not covered by the temporary administrative stay she issued. She ordered for both sides in the case to file briefs to her later this week and scheduled a hearing for Feb. 3 at 11 a.m. Eastern.

Diane Yentel, president and CEO of the National Council of Nonprofits, one of the organizations that filed the suit, said shortly afterward there are several steps ahead to fully block OMB's actions.

"A lot more work to do in the courts ... to ensure that this reckless action, or attempted action by OMB, can't move forward in the long term," Yentel said.



**President Donald Trump addresses the 2025 Republican Issues Conference at the Trump National Doral Miami on Jan. 27, 2025 in Doral, Florida.** (Photo by Joe Raedle/Getty Images)

## Confusion on Medicaid

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt sought to downplay the impact of the spending freeze during her first-ever briefing, saying it wouldn't apply to individual assistance programs, like Social Security or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or welfare benefits.

She was unable to answer questions about the effect on Medicaid benefits but a later White House memo claimed they would continue without interruption. Nonetheless, Democratic U.S. senators reported Medicaid portals in all 50 states were down on Tuesday.

Leavitt said the White House counsel's office had signed off on the temporary spending pause and believed it was legal and constitutional, but she later told reporters she didn't know the full scope of the impact and would have to circle back after the briefing ended.

"I have not seen the entire list because this memo was just sent out, so I will provide you all with updates as we receive them," Leavitt said.

Maine Republican Sen. Susan Collins, chairwoman of the Appropriations Committee, said in a brief interview she supports the Trump administration reviewing federal spending to look for ways to improve efficiency, but said the OMB's action was too broad.

"This is far too sweeping and will have an adverse effect on the delivery of services and programs," Collins said. "I do appreciate that the administration did not apply it to Social Security, Medicare, direct benefit programs. But nevertheless, it does have a large impact on the provision of services and programs."

Collins said she had concerns about the Head Start program being listed among those that will have a spending freeze.

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"There are a lot of federal programs that appear to be swept up in this order, and I think the administration needs to be more selective and look at it one department at a time, for example," Collins said. "But make sure important direct service programs are not affected."

## Multiple memos

The original OMB memo sent out late Monday evening appeared to apply to large swaths of federal financial assistance, including grants and loans, though a memo footnote said it should not be "construed to impact Medicare or Social Security benefits." It did not mention an exemption for Medicaid.

"Financial assistance should be dedicated to advancing Administration priorities, focusing taxpayer dollars to advance a stronger and safer America, eliminating the financial burden of inflation for citizens, unleashing American energy and manufacturing, ending 'wokeness' and the weaponization of government, promoting efficiency in government, and Making America Healthy Again," the OMB memo states.

A separate memo from OMB lists off the programs that will be paused temporarily while it reviews which federal spending it deems appropriate.

The list includes the Department of Agriculture's tribal food sovereignty program, Head Start, the Veterans' Affairs Department's suicide prevention and legal services grants, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance, or LIHEAP, program, and numerous sexual assault prevention programs within the Department of Justice.

A third document from OMB, sent to Capitol Hill, claimed that Medicaid would not be affected. However, some senators reported the Medicaid portal was inaccessible on Tuesday afternoon.

"In addition to Social Security and Medicare, already explicitly excluded in the guidance, mandatory programs like Medicaid and SNAP will continue without pause," the OMB document states. "Funds for small businesses, farmers, Pell grants, Head Start, rental assistance, and other similar programs will not be paused. If agencies are concerned that these programs may implicate the President's Executive Orders, they should consult OMB to begin to unwind these objectionable policies without a pause in the payments."

Oregon Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden posted on social media that his staff had "confirmed reports that Medicaid portals are down in all 50 states following last night's federal funding freeze."

"This is a blatant attempt to rip away health insurance from millions of Americans overnight and will get people killed," Wyden wrote.

Yentel, of the groups that sued, said while Leavitt argued that the memo did not impact those in need of direct assistance, OMB did not define who counts as "direct assistance."

She said during a briefing with reporters that the memo leaves "a lot of room to who defines direct assistance to Americans." Yentel said she would consider one of the programs impacted, Head Start, as direct assistance.

## Order prompts legal challenges

Numerous organizations — including the National Council of Nonprofits, American Public Health Association and Main Street Alliance — filed a lawsuit in federal court Tuesday ahead of the temporary pause taking effect.

Democratic attorneys general were also preparing to file a lawsuit, challenging the legality of the temporary spending pause on grants and loans.

New York state Attorney General Letitia James said during a virtual press conference announcing the lawsuit that Trump had overstepped his presidential powers by instituting the temporary spending pause.

"This president has exceeded his authority, he has violated the Constitution and he has trampled on a co-equal branch of government," James said.

She said Democratic attorneys general filing the lawsuit were not trying to be "adversarial" or seeking to block Trump's agenda.

"This is a question of the Constitution and the rule of law. And all of us took an oath to obey the Constitution and to uphold it," James said.



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New Jersey Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin said during the press briefing that the lawsuit wasn't "about nibbling at the edges of the president's authority."

"We're talking about ignoring the entirety of the United States Constitution," Platkin said.

Attorneys general from New York, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, North Carolina, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin, and the District of Columbia plan to file the lawsuit.

## Appropriators protest

The top Democrats on the U.S. House and Senate Appropriations committees sent a letter to acting OMB Director Matthew J. Vaeth, expressing alarm about how the stop in payments would affect people throughout the country and challenging the legality of the executive branch trying to overrule the legislative branch on spending decisions.

House Appropriations Committee ranking member Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., and Senate Appropriations Committee ranking member Patty Murray, D-Wash., wrote that the scope of the halt in funding, which was approved by Congress on a bipartisan basis, "is breathtaking, unprecedented, and will have devastating consequences across the country."

"While we may have strong policy disagreements, we should all be united in upholding our nation's laws and the Constitution," DeLauro and Murray wrote.

"We will be relentless in our work with members on both sides of the aisle and in both chambers to protect Congress's power of the purse," they added. "The law is the law—and we demand you in your role as Acting OMB Director reverse course to ensure requirements enacted into law are faithfully met and the nation's spending laws are implemented as intended."

## Power of the purse lies with Congress

Article I, Section 9, Clause 7 of the Constitution gives Congress the so-called "power of the purse" by granting it the authority to approve federal spending.

Congress has passed several laws regarding that constitutional authority, including the 1974 Impoundment Control Act, which says that the president cannot simply refuse to spend money Congress has appropriated.

Trump's pick for OMB Director, Russ Vought, has repeatedly called that law unconstitutional and said he believes the president does have the authority to simply ignore sections of spending law that have been passed by Congress and signed into law.

The Senate has yet to confirm Vought to the role of White House budget director, but is likely to do so in the weeks ahead.

Sharon Parrott, president of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a left-leaning think tank, posted on social media that the OMB memo's "vague and contradictory language makes it hard to know if funding is imperiled for public schools, community health centers, state and local law enforcement, veterans' housing, health care through Medicaid, public services on tribal lands, etc."

"This confusion & apparent withholding of funding isn't a political game – real state, local, & tribal governments, school districts, nonprofits, & private charities delivering services we all depend on, funded with taxpayer dollars, can't function without resources and clarity," Parrott wrote. "Congress has enacted legislation that requires the Executive Branch to fund public services, and the Trump Administration seems determined to subvert Congress, its hand-waving about following the law notwithstanding."

Parrott worked at OMB as associate director of the Education, Income Maintenance, and Labor Division, during then-President Barack Obama's second term.

Jenny Young, vice president of communications and chief of staff at Meals on Wheels America, said the OMB memo "could presumably halt service to millions of vulnerable seniors who have no other means of purchasing or preparing meals."

"And the lack of clarity and uncertainty right now is creating chaos for local Meals on Wheels providers not knowing whether they're going to be reimbursed for meals served today, tomorrow, who knows how

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long this could go on," Young said. "Which unfortunately means seniors may panic not knowing where their next meals will come from. This adds insult to injury as these programs are already underfunded to begin with. Largely speaking, local providers don't have the ability to absorb a blow like this, especially if it persists for any extended period of time."

Young said the Older Americans Act Nutrition Program, which provides some of Meals on Wheels funding, is a grant program administered by the Administration on Aging.

## Members of Congress react

Senate Budget Committee Chairman Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., said he was talking with staff at OMB to "try to get more information on how this works."

Graham said he wouldn't delay a committee vote Thursday to send Vought's nomination to the Senate floor.

"We need more information about this, but we also need a guy in charge," Graham said.

Kansas Republican Sen. Jerry Moran, a senior appropriator and chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, said during a brief interview that leadership at the VA was supposed to talk with OMB officials on Tuesday afternoon to figure out how exactly they were supposed to carry out the spending freeze for certain grant and loan programs.

"We're trying to get additional information about what it means on grants," Moran said. "I just came from a veterans' hearing where that was the topic of conversation. And my understanding is the VA leadership is meeting with OMB to learn the details, and then I'll have more of a response."

Alaska GOP Sen. Lisa Murkowski, who sits on the Senate Appropriations Committee, echoed similar remarks that she wanted more information on how much the memo impacted those federal programs.

North Dakota Republican Sen. John Hoeven, a senior appropriator, said he isn't too concerned about the temporary pause to federal grant and loan programs.

"He's taking a look at a lot of the spending as he should; reviewing it, finding out what makes sense and what doesn't," Hoeven said. "Just because it gets paused doesn't mean it won't get funded. And hopefully the ones that are funded are funded in a better way, more in line with our priorities."

Iowa Republican Sen. Joni Ernst said she wasn't worried about the impact of the temporary pause to grants and loans at the Defense Department and VA.

"I think they will take a look at it, they will release the funds as they find it necessary," Ernst said. "So I think there's a big flurry in the press right now, but I think that President Trump is doing the right thing by scrutinizing our spending."

## 'Take a deep breath'

North Carolina GOP Sen. Thom Tillis, an advocate for federal disaster aid, said he was skeptical that the freeze would immediately impact people in need of disaster relief.

"I can't imagine that the president would knowingly cut off housing assistance for people displaced from their homes," he said. "We need to get to the facts versus the fear."

Senate Majority Leader John Thune said during a press conference that he expected additional information from the Trump administration about the pause.

"They're providing additional clarity and guidance on that, and hopefully they will further clarify what exactly will be impacted," he said. "But I don't think it's unusual for an administration to pause."

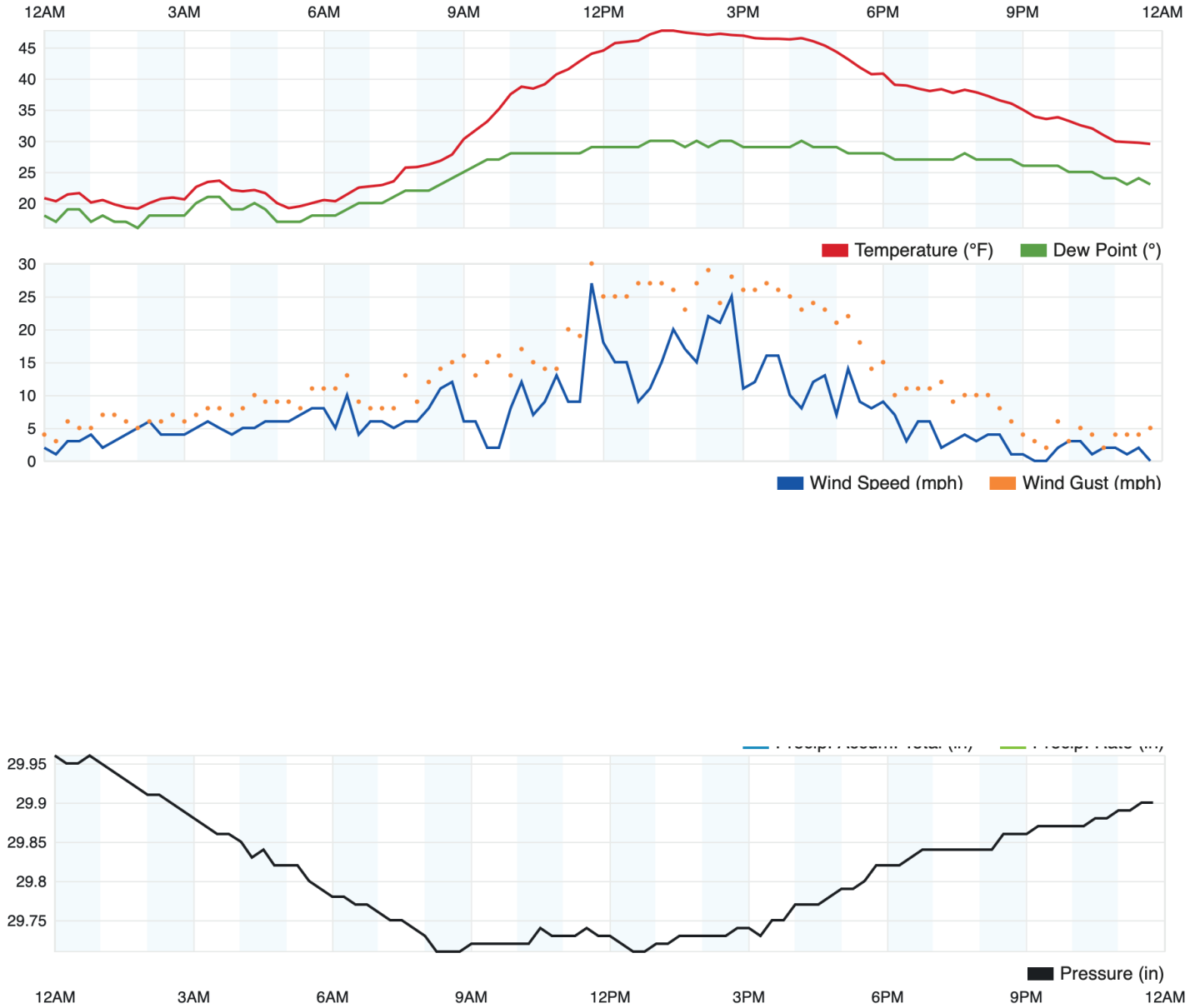
Sen. James Risch of Idaho added: "This is a work in progress. Everybody take a deep breath, stay calm. Every one of these programs is gonna be looked at."

*Ariana Figueroa, Shauneen Miranda and Ashley Murray contributed to this report.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 45 °F

Sunny

Tonight



Low: 24 °F

Mostly Clear

Thursday



High: 46 °F

Sunny

Thursday  
Night



Low: 19 °F

Mostly Clear

Friday



High: 33 °F

Partly Sunny



## Warm Rest of the Week Turning Colder Next Week

January 29, 2025  
3:36 AM

Today



Highs: 40 to 50°  
Lows: 23 to 30°

Thursday



Highs: 41 to 50°  
Lows: 18 to 22°

Friday



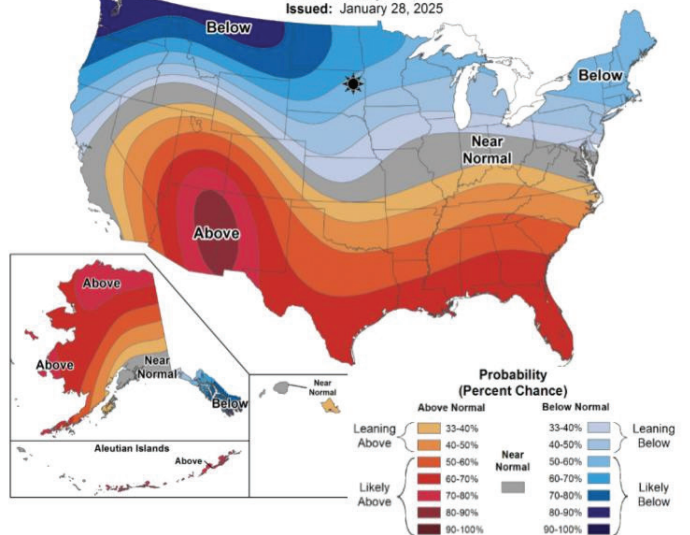
Highs: 31 to 46°  
Lows: 20 to 30°

\* Temperatures running 10-25° above average\*



## 6-10 Day Temperature Outlook

Valid: February 3 - 7, 2025  
Issued: January 28, 2025



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Enjoy the ongoing warmer temperatures through the end of the week, which are running about 10 to 25 degrees above average! Colder air moves back into the region starting early next week, behind a front, with overall temps running about 5 to 15 degrees below average.



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 48 °F at 1:33 PM

Low Temp: 19 °F at 1:57 AM

Wind: 31 mph at 1:50 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 42 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 58 in 1931

Record Low: -32 in 1951

Average High: 25

Average Low: 2

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.52

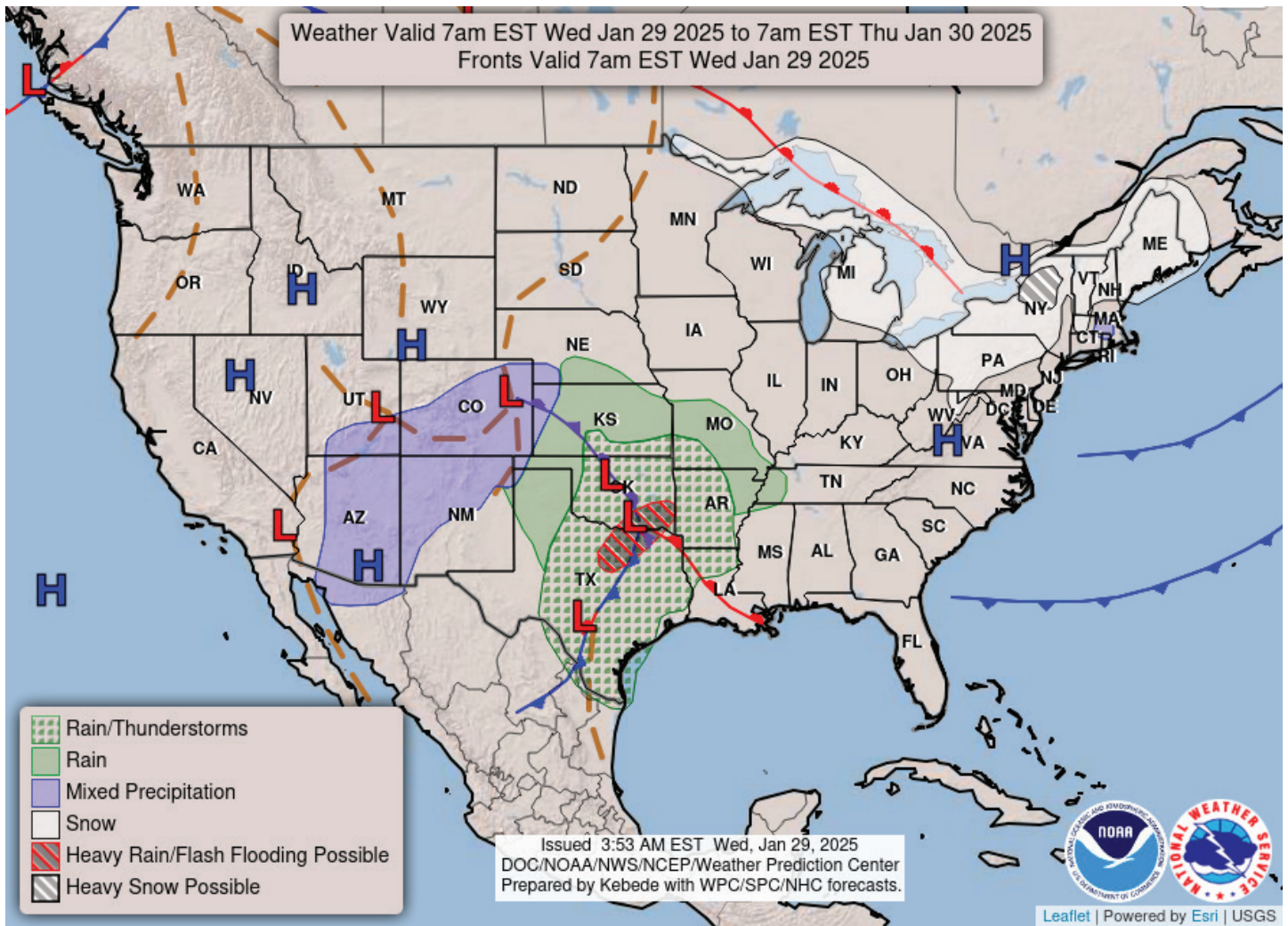
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.52

Precip Year to Date: 21.71

Sunset Tonight: 5:36:50 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:53:12 am



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## Today in Weather History

January 29, 2008: Arctic air combined with strong northwest winds of 20 to 40 mph to bring extreme wind chills to much of north-central and northeast South Dakota. The extreme wind chills began in the morning hours of January 29th across all of the area. The wind chills improved across north-central South Dakota by the evening and improved across northeast South Dakota during the morning hours of January 30th. The extreme wind chills ranged from 35 to 50 degrees below zero across the area. The extreme cold caused school delays and activity cancellations, along with much discomfort to people and livestock. On Monday, January 28th, the day before the extreme cold, a southerly flow brought very mild temperatures with some record highs set at several locations. Highs were in the 40s to the mid-50s across central and northeast South Dakota. When the Arctic front came through on January 28th, temperatures fell dramatically through the evening and early morning with below zero temperatures by Tuesday morning, January 29th. In fact, most locations across the area had a 40 to 55-degree temperature change from the 28th to the 29th.

1780 - On the coldest morning of a severe winter the mercury dipped to 16 degrees below zero at New York City, and reached 20 degrees below zero at Hartford CT. New York Harbor was frozen for five weeks, allowing a heavy cannon to be taken across the ice to fortify the British on Staten Island. (The Weather Channel)

1921: A small but intense windstorm resulted in the "Great Olympic Blowdown" in the Pacific Northwest. Hurricane-force winds funneled along the mountains downed vast expanses of Douglas fir trees, and the storm destroyed eight billion board feet of timber. Winds at North Head, WA, gusted to 113 mph. On January 31, 1921, the International News Services reported from Aberdeen, Washington, "It is reported that thousands of dollars in damage was done to buildings and storms in Aberdeen and Hoquiam. The wind velocity was estimated at from 125 to 150 miles an hour. Four steel smokestacks reaching almost 200 feet into the air were the first to collapse before the terrific onslaught of the gale. The giant chimneys crashed down on dwellings crushing them like houses of cardboard."

1947: On this date through the 30th, a fierce winter storm buried southern Wisconsin under two feet of snow. Strong northeasterly winds piled drifts up to 10 feet high in the Milwaukee area, shutting down the city for two days.

1983 - A series of Pacific coast storms finally came to an end. The storms, attributed in part to the ocean current, "El Nino," produced ocean swells 15 to 20 feet high which ravaged the beaches of southern California. Much of the damage was to homes of movie stars in the exclusive Malibu Colony. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A strong storm moving out of the Central Rockies spread snow across the north central states, with up to eight inches of snow in Wisconsin, and produced wind gusts to 64 mph at Goodland KS. A thunderstorm produced three inches of snow in forty-five minutes at Owing Mills MD. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Rain and snow were primarily confined to the northwestern U.S. An afternoon reading of 34 degrees at International Falls MN was a record high for the date. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Bitter cold air continued to pour into Alaska. At McGrath, temperature dipped to 63 degrees below zero. Strong winds blowing through the Alaska Range between Fairbanks and Anchorage produced a wind chill reading of 120 degrees below zero at Cantwell. (National Weather Summary)

1990 - Severe thunderstorms in the southeastern U.S. spawned a tornado which destroyed three mobile homes near Blythe GA injuring six persons. A fast moving cold front produced high winds in the western U.S. Winds along the coast of Oregon gusted to 65 mph at Portland, and high winds generated 22 to 26 foot seas which battered the coast. Winds near Reno NV gusted to 78 mph. High winds also buffeted the Central High Plains, with gusts to 94 mph reported at La Mesa CO. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A SMILE

He is recognized as a pioneer medical missionary, an African explorer who wanted to discover the source of the Nile River, a scientific investigator and a reformer of the political system in England.

One day at a Missionary Conference in London, a gracious man with a contagious smile noticed a young boy standing quietly with a puzzled look on his face. With a kind expression and that wonderful smile, he approached the youngster and asked, "Wouldn't you like to become a missionary?"

Years later David Livingstone said, "It was that smile and the kind, questioning face that led me to become a missionary."

Paul once wrote of Moses and said that "his face shown with the glory of God." The glory that was evident in the face of Moses came from his relationship with God – the source of all glory then and now.

And Paul also wrote, "I pray that God who gives you hope will keep you happy and full of peace as you believe in Him."

There is an obvious connection in Paul's mind that is expressed in his writings: If the glory of the Lord is on the inside of the Christian, it will be obvious to those around us by the expressions on our faces. If you know and love Jesus you will express His grace and glory through the smile on your face and the kindness in your voice.

Prayer: We ask, Heavenly Father, that we will be so filled with Your Spirit that our faces will reflect Your beauty, our voices Your kindness and our deeds Your love. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

*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: 01.28.25

10 19 31 47 56 6

MegaPlier: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$59,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 17 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.27.25

3 7 21 33 45 2

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$22,870,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 32 Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.28.25

7 20 24 39 43 9

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 47 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.25.25

6 7 14 29 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$20,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 47 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.27.25

1 9 34 63 67 6

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 16 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.27.25

2 40 47 53 55 20

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$69,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 16 Mins 13 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

## Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

### BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Christian 62, Herreid-Selby 42  
Baltic 50, McCook Central-Montrose 36  
Beresford 64, Irene-Wakonda 56  
Brandon Valley 65, Marshall, Minn. 60  
Bridgewater-Emery 59, Freeman Academy-Marion 44  
Castlewood 59, Colman-Egan 34  
Centerville 47, Tripp-Delmont-Armour 45  
Chester 61, Canistota 58  
Colome 61, Takini 46  
Corsica/Stickney 43, Wagner 32  
Dell Rapids 56, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 32  
Dell Rapids St Mary 74, Deubrook 40  
Deuel 46, Elkton-Lake Benton 44  
Dupree 71, Potter County 54  
Ekalaka, Mont. 48, Bison 40  
Faith 61, Sundance High School, Wyo. 58  
Faulkton 75, Northwestern 69  
Flandreau 58, Garretson 47  
Florence-Henry 67, Arlington 45  
Gayville-Volin High School 59, Scotland/Menno 47  
Harding County 61, New England, N.D. 59  
Harrisburg 50, Brookings 41  
Hitchcock-Tulare 65, Redfield 50  
Huron 64, Watertown 51  
Ipswich 56, Wakpala 50  
James Valley Christian School 53, Highmore-Harrold 42  
Kimball-White Lake 47, Bon Homme 43  
Lead-Deadwood 79, Moorcroft, Wyo. 38  
Leola-Frederick High School 62, Britton-Hecla 51  
Lyman 53, Jones County 44  
Madison 63, Chamberlain 37  
Mitchell 42, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 38  
Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 64, Flandreau Indian 47  
Parkston 62, Platte-Geddes 47  
Rapid City Christian 69, Custer 65  
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 54, Hanson 50  
Sioux Falls Christian 80, Tea 51  
Sioux Falls Lincoln 80, Sioux Falls Washington 35  
St Thomas More 43, Spearfish 41  
Sturgis Brown High School 60, Hill City 58  
Sully Buttes 43, Stanley County 40  
T F Riggs High School 62, Aberdeen Central 51  
Timber Lake 61, Kadoka 60, OT

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Tri-Valley 69, Canton 42  
Vermillion 87, Crow Creek Tribal School 35  
Waverly-South Shore 63, Webster 45  
Wessington Springs 70, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 41  
West Central 77, Parker 28  
White River 51, Philip 42  
Winner 77, Todd County 49  
Wolsey-Wessington 65, Sunshine Bible Academy 38

## **GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL**

Aberdeen Roncalli 38, Groton 26  
Andes Central/Dakota Christian 68, Wessington Springs 42  
Arlington 36, Florence-Henry 31  
Avon 43, Burke 40  
Belle Fourche 67, Hot Springs 24  
Bennett County 65, White River 47  
Beresford 63, Irene-Wakonda 28  
Bon Homme 41, Kimball-White Lake 28  
Britton-Hecla 39, Leola-Frederick High School 29  
Canton 45, Tri-Valley 38  
Centerville 74, Tripp-Delmont-Armour 35  
Colman-Egan 54, Castlewood 39  
Colome 46, Takini 26  
Custer 55, Rapid City Christian 53  
Deubrook 58, Dell Rapids St Mary 45  
Elkton-Lake Benton 52, Deuel 42  
Faulkton 45, Northwestern 39  
Garretson 52, Estelline-Hendricks 34  
Gayville-Volin High School 56, Scotland/Menno 37  
Great Plains Lutheran 56, Wilmot 37  
Gregory 44, Stanley County 28  
Hitchcock-Tulare 42, Redfield 19  
Huron 51, Watertown 43  
Lead-Deadwood 49, Moorcroft, Wyo. 38  
Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud 83, Pine Ridge 41  
Mitchell 49, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 41  
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 53, Dell Rapids 49, OT  
Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 74, Flandreau Indian 48  
Parkston 68, Platte-Geddes 29  
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 66, Hanson 47  
Sioux Falls Christian 48, Tea 37  
Sioux Falls Washington 52, Sioux Falls Lincoln 31  
Sioux Valley 59, DeSmet 32  
Spearfish 60, St Thomas More 37  
St. Francis Indian 59, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 52  
Sturgis Brown High School 49, Hill City 43  
T F Riggs High School 56, Aberdeen Central 55  
Wagner 49, Corsica/Stickney 36  
Warner 47, Langford 41  
West Central 61, Parker 29



Wolsey-Wessington 51, Sunshine Bible Academy 34  
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=  
Newell vs. New Underwood, ccd.

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

## Several people are feared dead in a stampede at the massive Maha Kumbh festival in India

By RAJESH KUMAR SINGH and SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

PRAYAGRAJ, India (AP) — Hours after a massive rush of Hindu pilgrims set off a stampede at the Maha Kumbh festival in northern India early Wednesday, Indian authorities were yet to release casualty figures even as the country's prime minister acknowledged the loss of lives and local media reports said 10 people had died.

The stampede happened when pilgrims rushing to a sacred river confluence tried to jump barricades erected for a procession of holy men, Uttar Pradesh state's top elected official, Yogi Adityanath, said in a televised statement. Adityanath said several pilgrims were injured, some seriously, in the stampede.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the incident "extremely sad" and extended his condolences to victims.

Most local news websites said at least 10 people were killed, with Hindi language newspaper Dainik Bhaskar putting the death toll at 20.

The Associated Press made repeated attempts to confirm the death toll and total number of injured, contacting multiple senior officials, but all said they were not authorized to release figures.

Wednesday was a sacred day during a six-week festival, and authorities in Prayagraj city were expecting a record 100 million devotees to engage in a ritual bath at the confluence of the Ganges, the Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati rivers. Hindus believe that a dip at the holy site can cleanse them of their past sins and end the process of reincarnation.

The main draw is the thousands of ash-smearred Hindu ascetics who make massive processions toward the confluence to bathe.

Millions continued to throng the 4,000-hectare (15 square mile) pilgrimage site despite the stampede, even as police urged them over megaphones to avoid the confluence. Adityanath urged people to instead take baths at other riverbanks.

"The situation is now under control, but there is a massive crowd of pilgrims," Adityanath said, adding that 90 to 100 million pilgrims were at the site.

"About 30 million people had taken the holy bath by 8 a.m. Wednesday," he said.

Distressed families lined up outside a makeshift hospital, desperate for the news of their missing loved ones. Clothes, blankets and backpacks were strewn around the scene of the stampede.

The Maha Kumbh festival, held every 12 years, started on Jan. 13 and is the world's largest religious gathering. Authorities expect more than 400 million people to throng the pilgrimage site in total. Nearly 150 million people have already attended, including the likes of Defense Minister Rajnath Singh and Home Minister Amit Shah and celebrities like Coldplay's Chris Martin.

A sprawling tent city has been built on the riverbanks to accommodate millions of visitors. It has roads, electricity and water, 3,000 kitchens and 11 hospitals.

About 50,000 security personnel are stationed in the city to maintain law and order and manage crowds, and more than 2,500 cameras monitor crowd movement and density so officials can try to prevent such crushes.

The 45-day festival is a significant cultural event for India's Hindus, who make up nearly 80% of the country's more than 1.4 billion people. It's also a prestige event for Modi, whose ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party's boasts of promoting Hindu cultural symbols.

The Maha Kumbh festival has been marred by stampedes in the past. In 2013, at least 40 pilgrims who were taking part in the same festival were killed in a stampede at a train station in Prayagraj.

Deadly stampedes are relatively common around Indian religious festivals, where large crowds gather in small areas. In July at least 116 people died, most of them women and children, when thousands at a religious gathering in northern India stampeded at a tent camp in Hathras town.

## **Middle East latest: 2 Palestinians killed by Israeli fire in occupied West Bank, officials say**

By The Associated Press undefined

The Palestinian Health Ministry says two Palestinians were killed by Israeli fire in the occupied West Bank overnight and into Wednesday.

A 23-year-old man was shot dead in Tulkarem and a 25-year-old man was killed in a strike on Jenin, where Israel launched a large operation earlier this month.

The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its reports. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military.

The West Bank has seen a surge in violence since Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack out of the Gaza Strip ignited the war there. The ministry says over 800 Palestinians have been killed. Most appear to have been militants killed in battle during Israeli arrest raids, but the dead also include people killed during violent protests, as well as civilian bystanders.

There has also been an uptick in settler violence against Palestinians and Palestinian attacks on Israelis since the start of the war.

Israel captured the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want all three territories for their future state.

Here's the latest:

Israeli authorities say they arrested 12 Palestinians in east Jerusalem

JERUSALEM — Israeli authorities say they have arrested 12 Palestinians in east Jerusalem who celebrated the release of prisoners under the Israel-Hamas ceasefire deal.

Israel's internal Shin Bet security service and the police said they arrested the men late Tuesday after videos taken earlier in the week showed the men celebrating the release of the prisoners by waving Hamas flags and firing guns into the air.

They say the Palestinians who celebrated the release had violated the ban on "expressions of joy" and "identification with Hamas" that Israel has imposed since the ceasefire took hold. They said a search revealed Hamas flags, posters, fireworks, a BB gun and cash.

Under the first phase of the deal, Hamas is releasing 33 hostages taken in the Oct. 7, 2023 attack that ignited the war in exchange for the release for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, including some serving life sentences for deadly attacks on Israelis.

Palestinians generally view the prisoners as heroes imprisoned for fighting against Israel's decades-long occupation of lands they want for a future state.

## **Defense secretary pulls Trump critic Gen. Milley's security clearance and protective detail**

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth is pulling the security protections and clearance of retired Joint Chiefs chairman Gen. Mark Milley, and has ordered the Pentagon's inspector general to review Milley's actions while serving as the nation's top uniformed officer to determine if a demotion is warranted, two defense officials confirmed late Tuesday.

The inspector general review will include "an inquiry into the facts and circumstances surrounding Gen. Milley's conduct so that the Secretary may determine whether it is appropriate to reopen his military grade review determination," said Pentagon spokesman John Ulyot.

"The Secretary informed General Milley today that he is revoking the authorization for his security detail and suspending his security clearance as well," he said.

Milley served as chairman during President Donald Trump's first term in office. While the relationship initially went well, it soured deeply and fast, as Milley tried to advise and contain the president on a host of issues.

He pushed back on the president's interest in using force domestically to quell protestors after the death of George Floyd, and was at the center of a controversy in 2021 when he made independent calls to his Chinese counterpart. Trump called the calls an act of treason, but at the time Milley said the calls were routine and part of the scope of his job.

Milley in his final days as chairman after Trump had left office was equally outspoken about his former boss. He said at his official retirement ceremony "we don't take an oath to a king or a queen or to a tyrant or a dictator. And we don't take an oath to a wannabe dictator."

"We don't take an oath to an individual. We take an oath to the Constitution, and we take an oath to the idea that is America, and we're willing to die to protect it," he said at the time.

Hegseth's chief of staff Joe Kasper said that the decision to strip Milley of his clearance and detail was taken because "undermining the chain of command is corrosive to our national security, and restoring accountability is a priority for the Defense Department under President Trump's leadership."

The moves, which were first reported by Fox News, may also include taking down Milley's Army chief of staff portrait. Milley's chairman portrait was stripped from the wall just hours after Trump was sworn in. The portraits were both paid for by a donation from the Association of the United States Army, not taxpayer dollars, and were a gift to Milley honoring his service.

## **The Year of the Snake is underway with Lunar New Year festivities in Asia and around the world**

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Lunar New Year festivals and prayers marked the start of the Year of the Snake around Asia and farther afield on Wednesday — including in Moscow.

Hundreds of people lined up in the hours before midnight at the Wong Tai Sin Taoist temple in Hong Kong in a bid to be among the first to put incense sticks in the stands in front of the temple's main hall.

"I wish my family will be blessed. I hope my business will run well. I pray for my country and wish people peace. I hope this coming year is a better year," said Ming So, who visits the temple annually on the eve of the Lunar New Year.

The holiday — known as the Spring Festival in China, Tet in Vietnam and Seollal in Korea — is a major festival celebrated by diaspora communities around the world. The snake, one of 12 animals in the Chinese zodiac, follows the just-ended Year of the Dragon.

The pop-pop-pop of firecrackers greeted the new year outside Guan Di temple in Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur, followed by lion dances to the rhythmic beat of drums and small cymbals.

Ethnic Chinese holding incense sticks in front of them bowed several times inside the temple before sticking the incense into elaborate gold-colored pots, the smoke rising from the burning tips.

Many Chinese who work in bigger cities return home during the eight-day national holiday in what is described as the world's biggest annual movement of humanity. Beijing, China's capital, has turned into a bit of a ghost town, with many shops closed and normally crowded roads and subways emptied out.

Traditionally, Chinese have a family dinner at home on New Year's Eve and visit "temple fairs" on the Lunar New Year to watch performances and buy snacks, toys and other trinkets from booths.

Many Chinese take advantage of the extended holiday to travel both in the country and abroad. Ctrip, an online booking agency that operates Trip.com, said the most popular overseas destinations this year are Japan, Thailand, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, the United States, South Korea, Macao and Vietnam.

Russians cheered, waved and took smartphone photos of a colorful procession with drummers, costumed dancers and large dragon and snake figures held aloft that kicked off a 10-day Lunar New Year festival in Moscow on Tuesday night.

The Chinese and Russian governments have deepened ties since 2022, in part to push back against what they see as U.S. dominance of the world order.

Visitors shouted "Happy New Year" in Russian and expressed delight at being able to experience Chinese food and culture in Moscow, including folk performances and booths selling snacks and artwork.

## **M23 rebels expand their control in east Congo as Rwanda's Kagame joins calls for ceasefire**

By CHINEDU ASADU and JUSTIN KABUMBA GOMA, Congo

Associated Press (AP) — Rwanda-backed rebels captured large parts of eastern Congo's largest city including its airport, the United Nations said, as Rwanda's president on Wednesday joined calls for a ceasefire in the decadeslong conflict.

Much of the beleaguered city of Goma was calm early Wednesday morning, after a day during which thousands of fleeing people hunkered down by roadsides as missiles flew and injured people streamed to overwhelmed hospitals.

While government forces still control pockets of Goma, residents who spoke to The Associated Press by phone on Tuesday said that the M23 rebel group was in control of much of the city.

The M23 rebels, who claimed to have captured the city on Monday after a weeklong advance, are one of about 100 armed groups vying for a foothold in mineral-rich eastern Congo. The conflict escalated with the rebels' advance into Goma, which left dead bodies on the streets and drove hundreds of thousands of already displaced people to flee once again.

After clashing with government forces, the rebels took control of the airport, U.N. spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said at a briefing on Tuesday, warning of "risks of a breakdown of law and order in the city given the proliferation of weapons."

Rwandan President Paul Kagame said on X that he spoke with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio on "the need to ensure a ceasefire and address the root causes of the conflict once and for all."

His government denies supporting M23, despite reports from U.N. experts who estimate there are up to 4,000 Rwandan forces in Congo. Rwanda has accused Congo of enlisting Hutu rebels and former militia-men whom it blames for the 1994 genocide.

Rwandan Foreign Minister Olivier Nduhugirehe has told The Associated Press that Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi "will have to accept talks with M23" to bring an end to the conflict.

M23, made up primarily of ethnic Tutsis, has told the AP that it plans to set up an administration in the city so people can continue living normal lives and displaced people can return home.

Analysts have warned that securing a rebel withdrawal could be more difficult than in 2012, when M23 first captured Goma but withdrew after days. Murithi Mutiga, program director for Africa at the Crisis Group, said that the group has become more emboldened by Rwanda, which feels Congo is ignoring its interests in the region and which has accused Congo of failing to meet demands of previous peace agreements.

## **Israeli father says even in Hamas captivity, his daughter heard his pleas to come home alive**

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

RAMAT GAN, Israel (AP) — For more than 470 days, Eitan Gonen publicly pleaded with his daughter to stay alive while in Hamas captivity. He didn't know if she would hear him, but he ended every interview he gave with the same hopeful message: Romi is coming home alive.

When he finally got to speak to his daughter for the first time in 15 months after she and two other women were freed Jan. 19, he got his answer.



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"She said, 'Dad, I came home alive,'" Eitan Gonen told The Associated Press on Tuesday in his first interview with an international news outlet since her release.

"I know that my interview back then gave Romi a lot of strength, a lot of hope, something to cling on," he said.

Romi Gonen, 24, was among the first hostages to be freed from Gaza and one of seven women so far released in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners as part of the ceasefire, a long and uncertain process aimed at eventually ending the war. Some 250 people were kidnapped during Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack that triggered the war. About 90 hostages remain in Gaza, although at least a third of them are believed to be dead.

During the ceasefire's first phase, Hamas agreed to gradually release 33 hostages in exchange for Israel freeing nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. Six more hostages are expected to be released this week in exchange for hundreds of prisoners.

Israel has been preparing for the hostages to return, with the expectation that after more than a year in captivity, many would likely be dealing with life-threatening health issues or other physical and psychological problems. This week, Dr. Ami Benov, who is working with the hostages, told reporters that the women were in poor physical condition and would face a lengthy recovery process, as they suffered from "mild starvation" and vitamin deficiencies.

Sitting in a complex in central Israel where his daughter and some of the other freed hostages are staying, Eitan Gonen wouldn't comment on Romi's health but said there's a long road ahead.

"The rehabilitation status just started," he said. Because she spent so long in captivity, the family isn't pressuring her to speak. Instead, they are trying to give her autonomy and control, and to let her take things at her own pace, he said.

Like many others, Romi was taken captive at the Nova music festival. That morning, her sister and mother, Merav Leshem Gonen, spent nearly five hours speaking to Romi as militants marauded through the festival grounds. Romi told her family that she would try to hide in the bushes, as the roads being clogged with abandoned cars made escape impossible.

For nearly two months, her family had no idea if she was dead. They only learned she was alive from other hostages who were freed during a weeklong ceasefire a month after the attack, Eitan Gonen said.

Praising his daughter's strength, he said she survived in part by learning Arabic, as it was the only way to communicate with her captors.

"Human beings will do anything to survive. Anything. And since the terrorists don't speak any other language other than Arabic, she didn't have any chance in order to communicate with them — to start learning their language," he said, noting that she has even spoken it at times since being freed, likely out of habit.

Something else that helped her stay alive was the support from other hostages, Eitan Gonen said. For a period, Romi was held with Emily Damari, a British-Israeli hostage who was released along with her. "I believe God set it up somehow that Emily and Romi ... had each other to survive. ... It's a dynamic duo," he said.

Other released hostages expressed similar sentiments about their own time in captivity. Israeli soldier Naama Levy, who was released Saturday, wrote in an Instagram post that after spending 50 days mostly alone, she was given strength when she was reunited with other kidnapped soldiers.

Being held hostage with someone can provide strength through a shared fight for survival in the face of unimaginable adversity, said Dr. Einat Yehene, a psychologist who specializes in trauma and loss and who is head of rehabilitation at the Hostages Families Forum.

Even though he finally got his daughter back, Eitan Gonen is still urging the Israeli government to keep working to bring home all of the remaining hostages. And he urges the families of hostages to keep giving interviews in all languages and mediums, to maintain the pressure and let their relatives know they haven't been forgotten.

But he's mostly focusing on spending time with his daughter.

"I just enjoy being with her even in silence, touching, hugging, watching her," he said. "I missed it so much."

## North Korean leader Kim inspects nuclear facility as Pyongyang pressures Trump administration

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and FOSTER KLUG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un inspected a facility that produces nuclear material and called for bolstering the country's nuclear fighting capability, state media reported Wednesday, as the North looks to increase pressure on the United States following the inauguration of President Donald Trump.

Kim's visit suggests a continued emphasis on an expansion of North Korea's nuclear arsenal, though Trump has said he's willing to talk to Kim again to revive diplomacy. Many analysts view North Korean weapons moves as part of a strategy to win sanctions relief and political concessions from the United States.

The official Korean Central News Agency reported that Kim visited the nuclear-material production base and the Nuclear Weapons Institute. It didn't say where those facilities are located, but North Korean photos of Kim's visit indicated that he likely visited a uranium-enrichment facility that he went to last September. That visit was North Korea's first disclosure of a uranium-enrichment facility since it showed one to visiting American scholars in 2010.

During the latest visit, Kim said North Korea reported "amazing" results in its production of nuclear material last year and underlined the need to exceed this year's production goal to strengthen "the nuclear shield of the country," according to KCNA.

Kim said that further boosting the country's nuclear counteraction posture is "our invariable noble task" to cope with intensifying challenges posed by "hostile forces," an apparent reference to the U.S. and South Korea.

The start of Trump's second term raises prospects for the resumption of diplomacy between the United States and North Korea, as Trump met Kim three times during his first term. The Trump-Kim diplomacy in 2018-19 fell apart due to wrangling over U.S.-led economic sanctions on North Korea, and Kim has since significantly dialed up weapons testing activities.

During a Fox News interview broadcast Thursday, Trump called Kim "a smart guy" and "not a religious zealot." Asked whether he will reach out to Kim again, Trump replied, "I will, yeah."

North Korea hasn't yet directly responded to Trump's overture as it continues its belligerent rhetoric against the U.S. along with weapons testing activities. Many experts say Kim could eventually sit down for talks with Trump and would likely think he now has greater leverage than before because of his enlarged nuclear arsenal and deepening military ties with Russia.

On Sunday, North Korea said it tested a cruise missile system, its third known weapons display this year, and vowed "the toughest" response to what it called the escalation of U.S.-South Korean military drills.

North Korea views U.S. military training with South Korea as invasion rehearsals, though Washington and Seoul have repeatedly said their drills are defensive in nature. In recent years, the United States and South Korea have expanded their military exercises in response to North Korea's advancing nuclear program.

During the September visit to the uranium-enrichment facility, Kim stressed the need to further augment the number of centrifuges to "exponentially" build more nuclear weapons.

North Korea first unveiled a uranium enrichment site at its main Yongbyon nuclear complex to a visiting delegation of American scholars in 2010. Many experts say the uranium enrichment facility disclosed in September was likely a different place from the one shown to the U.S. scholars.

Nuclear weapons can be built using either highly enriched uranium or plutonium, and North Korea has a facility at Yongbyon to produce weapons-grade plutonium as well. Estimates of how many nuclear bombs North Korea can add every year vary, ranging from six to as many as 18.

In 2018, a top South Korean official told parliament that North Korea was estimated to have already manufactured 20 to 60 nuclear weapons, but some experts say the North likely has more than 100.

## Federal judge temporarily blocks Trump administration freeze on federal grants and loans

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge on Tuesday temporarily blocked a push from President Donald Trump to pause federal funding while his administration conducts an across-the-board ideological review to uproot progressive initiatives.

The order capped the most chaotic day for the U.S. government since Trump returned to office, with uncertainty over a crucial financial lifeline causing panic and confusion among states, schools and organizations that rely on trillions of dollars from Washington.

U.S. District Judge Loren L. AliKhan blocked the funding freeze only minutes before it was scheduled to take effect. The administrative stay, prompted by a lawsuit brought by nonprofit groups that receive federal money, lasts until Monday afternoon. Another court hearing is scheduled that morning to consider the issue.

The White House did not immediately comment on the order, which leaves unresolved a potential constitutional clash over control of taxpayer money. Democrats who have struggled to gain a foothold during Trump's second term unleashed on the Republican president, describing his actions as capricious and illegal.

Administration officials said the decision to halt loans and grants was necessary to ensure that spending complies with Trump's recent blitz of executive orders. The Republican president wants to increase fossil fuel production, remove protections for transgender people and end diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.

But a vaguely worded memo issued by the Office of Management and Budget, combined with incomplete answers from the White House throughout the day, left lawmakers, public officials and average Americans struggling to figure out what programs would be affected by the pause. Even temporary interruptions in funding could cause layoffs or delays in public services.

"This sort of came out of the blue," said David Smith, a spokesperson for the Shawnee Mission School District in Kansas, one of countless districts that receive federal funding. Now they're trying to figure out what it means "based on zero information."

Democrats argued that the president had no right to unilaterally stop spending money appropriated by Congress. Just minutes after AliKhan made her ruling, Democratic attorneys general from 22 states and the District of Columbia filed their own lawsuit seeking to block and permanently prevent the administration from cutting off federal funding.

"There is no question this policy is reckless, dangerous, illegal and unconstitutional," New York Attorney General Letitia James said.

AliKhan, who was appointed by President Joe Biden, questioned how much the details of the funding freeze had been nailed down as she issued her order.

"It seems like the federal government currently doesn't actually know the full extent of the programs that are going to be subject to the pause," she said.

Jessica Morton, an attorney for the National Council of Nonprofits, which brought the suit, said the group has tens of thousands of members around the country who could be affected.

"Our client members have reported being extremely concerned about having to shutter if there's even a brief pause," Morton said.

Justice Department attorney Daniel Schwei argued that the freeze shouldn't be put on hold because the plaintiffs hadn't specified anyone who would immediately lose funding if it does go into effect.

Trump administration officials said programs that provide direct assistance to Americans would not be affected, such as Medicare, Social Security, student loans and food stamps. But they sometimes struggled to provide a clear picture.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt initially would not say whether Medicaid was exempted from the freeze, but the administration later clarified that it was.

Although Trump had promised to turn Washington upside down if elected to a second term, the effects

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of his effort to pause funding were being felt far from the nation's capital. Organizations like Meals on Wheels, which receives federal money to deliver food to the elderly, were worried about getting cut off.

"The lack of clarity and uncertainty right now is creating chaos," spokeswoman Jenny Young said. She added that "seniors may panic not knowing where their next meals will come from."

The National Science Foundation postponed this week's panels for reviewing grant applications. Officials in Prichard, Alabama, feared they wouldn't receive infrastructure funding to fix their leaking drinking water system. Republican leaders in Louisiana said they were "seeking clarity" to ensure nothing was "jeopardizing financial stability of the state."

"Trump's actions would wreak havoc in red and blue communities everywhere," said Sen. Patty Murray of Washington, the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee. "We are talking about our small towns, our cities, our school districts."

The full scope of the administration's review was spelled out in a 51-page spreadsheet sent to federal agencies and viewed by The Associated Press. Each line was a different government initiative, from pool safety to tribal workforce development to special education.

Officials were directed to answer a series of yes or no questions for every item on the list, including "does this program promote gender ideology?" or "does this program promote or support in any way abortion?" Responses are due by Feb. 7.

Trillions of dollars are potentially under review. Grants that have been awarded but not spent are also supposed to be halted if they might violate one of Trump's executive orders.

"The use of Federal resources to advance Marxist equity, transgenderism, and green new deal social engineering policies is a waste of taxpayer dollars that does not improve the day-to-day lives of those we serve," wrote Matthew Vaeth, the acting director of the Office of Management and Budget, in a memo distributed Monday.

Vaeth wrote that "each agency must complete a comprehensive analysis of all of their Federal financial assistance programs to identify programs, projects, and activities that may be implicated by any of the President's executive orders." He also wrote that the pause should be implemented "to the extent permissible under applicable law."

The pause on grants and loans was scheduled to take effect at 5 p.m. EST, just one day after agencies were informed of the decision.

Leavitt, who held her first White House briefing on Tuesday, said the administration was trying to be "good stewards" of public money by making sure that there was "no more funding for transgenderism and wokeness."

She denied that Trump was deliberately challenging Congress to establish his dominance over the federal budget.

"He's just trying to ensure that the tax money going out the door in this very bankrupt city actually aligns with the will and the priorities of the American people," she said.

The attempt to implement a funding pause is the latest example of how Trump is harnessing his power over the federal system to advance his conservative goals. Unlike during his first term, when Trump and many members of his inner circle were unfamiliar with Washington, this time he's reaching deep into the bureaucracy.

For example, federal employees are being asked to report their colleagues if they try to continue diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.

"They are pushing the president's agenda from the bottom up," said Paul Light, an expert on the federal government and professor emeritus of public service at New York University.

He also said there are risks in Trump's approach, especially with so many voters reliant on Washington. "You can't just hassle, hassle, hassle," Light said. "You've got to deliver."

Fears about interruption in government services were exacerbated as states reported problems with the Medicaid funding portal, where officials request reimbursement for providing healthcare to poor residents.

Democrats condemned the Trump administration, connecting the issue to the funding pause.

But Leavitt said the portal would be back online soon.



"We have confirmed no payments have been affected — they are still being processed and sent," she posted on social media. The White House did not provide an explanation for the problem.

## Who can share seeds? As climate change and counterfeits hurt Kenyan farmers, it's a growing question

By EVELYNE MUSAMBI Associated Press

KIKUYU, Kenya (AP) — Tucked away in a lush, forested area of central Kenya's Kikuyu town, the National Seed Bank stands as a crucial safeguard for the future of the country's agriculture. Inside two chilly rooms of a government building, more than 50,000 seed varieties are cataloged and stored.

The bank was established in 1988 after the realization that some traditional varieties of seeds were being lost, an occurrence that is becoming more common with climate change. It aims to conserve seeds for research and reintroduction to farms.

"We realize that some of the traditional varieties that we had abandoned then are actually more resilient to climate change, so when you introduce them especially in marginal areas, those varieties outperform the improved varieties," said the director of the Genetic Resources Research Institute that operates the bank, Desterio Nyamongo, referring to hybrid seeds that must be bought every planting season.

He said the some of bank's seeds also were found to be more resistant to diseases and pests and were high-yielding.

This gives hope to a country that relies heavily on rain-fed agriculture instead of irrigation, leaving it more vulnerable to climate shocks like drought. The sector contributes a third of Kenya's GDP.

Kenya is not alone facing food security pressures. According to a U.N Food and Agriculture and Organization report in 2023, over a billion people across the African continent are unable to afford healthy diets, and the number of hungry people is increasing.

But in Kenya, another complication has emerged. Farmers in recent months suffered losses in the millions of shillings (tens of thousands of dollars) after planting counterfeit seeds bought from private sellers.

Kenyan officials have acknowledged that the seed sector is critical.

During the country's first international seed quality conference in August, the agriculture ministry's permanent secretary, Paul Rono, said Africa has limited capacity to produce high-quality certified seeds that are subjected to quality standards.

The head of the Eastern Africa Farmers Federation, Stephen Muchiri, said the vigor of crops in Kenya has become low, and he believes that the main reason is a flawed seed breeding and propagation program.

But some farmers say efforts to improve the seed system in Kenya have been limited by a 2012 law banning seed sharing, which is what millions of farmers did every planting season to cut their production cost.

The government has said the law is meant to prevent the circulation of uncertified seeds and protects farmers, but it faces a court challenge from more than a dozen farmers across Kenya who say it's expensive having to buy new seeds every planting season. The next hearing in the case is in March.

Francis Ngiri is one of the farmers who filed the case. He runs an indigenous seed bank for the local community on his five-acre farm in the semi-arid Gilgil area located 120 kilometers (74 miles) from the capital, Nairobi.

His work has become a learning ground for farmers who have experienced disappointing yields from hybrid seeds.

"We have seen that indigenous seeds are more resilient and perform better in our area even when there is reduced rainfall," he told The Associated Press.

He passionately shares his knowledge on conserving the seeds using traditional methods such as covering them with wood ash — believed to repel weevils — or keeping them in earthen pots. He emphasized the use of locally available materials at no cost.

Farmer Maximilla Onyura, who farms sorghum in the western county of Busia, said indigenous crops offer a food security solution. She isn't part of the legal challenge but collaborates with Ngiri through a

Kenyan organization called the Seed Savers Network.

However, "instead of our government encouraging those offering solutions through indigenous crops, they are now cracking down on those sharing seeds at community level," she said.

Seed sharing in Kenya can bring two years in prison, a fine of up to 1 million Kenyan shillings (\$7,700), or both. No farmer has been charged.

The National Seed Bank occasionally distributes some of its collection to farmers at no cost in the hope that the varieties that had long adapted to local conditions will be more resilient.

The director, Nyamongo, said farmers who cannot afford farm inputs like fertilizers required for hybrid seeds are better off planting the traditional varieties.

"It would be wrong for farmers, especially farmers in marginal areas, to start thinking that using the indigenous seed is backwardness," he said. "Far from it, because some of the indigenous varieties have adapted over time to the local conditions and therefore, they are more resilient."

Nyamongo did not comment on the farmers' court challenge to the seed-sharing ban.

The president of the Dutch-based climate change adaptation nonprofit Global Center on Adaptation, Patrick V. Verkooijen, said governments can invest in community-based seed programs to preserve a diversity of indigenous varieties.

"Indigenous crop varieties offer many benefits, particularly their genetic diversity, which helps farmers adapt to climate change, combat pests and diseases and manage poor soil fertility. However, they also come with challenges, such as potentially lower yields or susceptibility to new pests and diseases," he said.

Kenyan proponents of indigenous seeds like Ngiri said lower yields and susceptibility to new pests and diseases only happen when a seed variety is taken from its native location.

"The reason why they are indigenous is because they have adapted to the climatic conditions and the diseases found in the area they originally came from," Ngiri said.

## **Flawed emergency alert systems lagged when residents needed them most during Los Angeles wildfires**

By CHRISTOPHER L. KELLER, CLAUDIA LAUER, AMY TAXIN and REBECCA BOONE Associated Press  
LOS ANGELES (AP) — When disaster strikes, government emergency alert systems offer a simple promise: Residents will get information about nearby dangers and instructions to help them stay safe.

As the deadly LA wildfires and other major emergencies have shown, alerts rely on a complicated chain of communication between first responders, government administrators, third-party companies and the public.

Sometimes, the chain breaks.

After the wind-driven wildfires broke out in Southern California on Jan. 7, evacuation orders for some neighborhoods — including the part of Altadena where the majority of deaths occurred — came long after houses were reported on fire. On Tuesday, Los Angeles County officials approved an outside review of how alerts functioned in the Eaton Fire and Palisades Fire in response to residents' demands. City officials declined to answer AP's questions about a lag in some Palisades Fire alerts, though Fire Capt. Branden Silverman said responding to a fire and determining evacuation needs can take some time.

It's an increasingly common issue: After-action reports and investigations revealed issues with alert systems in other California blazes: in the 2017 Tubbs Fire, which killed 22 people in Santa Rosa; the 2018 Camp Fire, which killed 85 people in Paradise; the Woolsey fire, which started the same day and killed three in Malibu; as well as in Colorado's 2021 Marshall Fire, which destroyed more than 1,000 homes outside Denver; and in Hawaii's 2023 Lahaina Fire, which decimated that historic town and killed 102.

It could take months to know why some evacuation orders lagged in the Los Angeles fires.

Several residents who lost homes in the Eaton Fire told The Associated Press they received no notifications about their neighborhoods. For others, the first warning was an urgent text message in the middle of the night.

Susan Lee Streets, who signed up for the alert app Nixle, did not get any alerts specific to her west

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Altadena neighborhood before she and her family left of their own accord around 10 p.m. after losing power and cell reception.

"If we had even been informed that houses and other structures were burning down, we would have known better what was happening," she said. "We almost went to sleep that night with two kids and a dog and two cats in the house."

Only after 3 a.m. did an alert hit her phone. Destroyed along with the house are the Christmas ornaments she saved for her children, and countless other family keepsakes.

"We lost everything, everything," Streets said, breaking into tears.

Tricia Wachtendorf, director of the Disaster Research Center at the University of Delaware, said alerts have to be specific and clear. Research has shown that for them to be effective, people have to hear, understand, believe, personalize and confirm them before they react.

"Just because you send the message at 3 a.m. doesn't mean someone is hearing it," Wachtendorf said.

The hours between midnight and 3:30 a.m. appear to have been particularly challenging for first responders in Los Angeles County, based on an AP review of scanner traffic recordings and data from CalFire, the state's chief fire agency; the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA; and the Watch Duty app.

Resources were stretched thin, and hurricane-force winds had grounded air support, limiting authorities' ability to get a top-down perspective on the flames.

Calls reporting burning homes were flooding in as embers blew onto roofs and yards. During one half-hour period, 17 new addresses were relayed to firefighters, even as some crews ran low on fuel.

By 12:07 a.m., CalFire records show, dozens of neighborhoods had been ordered to evacuate because of the Eaton Fire, all of them east of Altadena's North Lake Avenue. None of the neighborhoods to the west — where all of the 17 confirmed fatalities occurred, as first reported by the Los Angeles Times — had received evacuation warnings or orders, despite house fires being reported there more than an hour earlier.

Over the next three hours, fire crews would go from begging for resources on the eastern flank of the blaze to radioing the command center to make sure it knew the fire was spreading west along the foothills near Sunset Ridge.

Just before 3:30 a.m., evacuation orders expanded significantly, with residents in 12 areas of Altadena and elsewhere told to "leave now."

Jodi and Jeff Moreno first heard about the fire from a neighborhood app. But the first official warning only came around 2:30 a.m., when authorities yelled through a bullhorn to evacuate. The couple grabbed their three daughters, their dog and some important papers, and fled.

There were no text alerts until after they were gone.

"On the neighborhood apps, some people were going, some people were staying. It was a wide variety of responses. We were navigating it on our own," Jodi Moreno said. "It's hard for us to gauge where exactly is that fire, where are the embers blowing. ... Those are things I would rely on people who are monitoring it" for information.

Desperate for more information, both the Morenos and Streets downloaded the Watch Duty app, which maps evacuation zones and consolidates information from multiple sources into a single stream. Launched in 2021 and today covering 22 states, it became a lifeline for them.

"The ideal system for warning people is informing them, right?" said Nick Russell, vice president for operations at Watch Duty.

"There's certainly diligence necessary in the execution of official evacuation warning and orders or shelter in place, whatever the condition might be," he said. "But telling people why that discussion is taking place between law enforcement and fire is important. And that's what we're doing."

The process of issuing evacuation notices starts with firefighters or other personnel on the ground recommending action, Russell said. It then moves up the chain of command to sheriffs, who ultimately put out any order.

During major emergencies that communication can be hampered by issues such as limited radio connectivity, wind noise or other technical problems. Incident command stations may have trouble synthesizing

the large amounts of information they are getting from different agencies, something that is critical for understanding the scope of an emergency like a fire.

In Los Angeles County, residents who sign up for emergency notifications through the AlertLACounty website are then directed to a list of 57 links to other specific neighborhood or city alert system signups, as well as a general one covering 19 other cities. The city of Los Angeles and the Sheriff's Department also have alert systems.

It is not clear how the overlapping systems, which use different software programs, work together, or whether officials coordinate.

A 2024 Hazard Mitigation plan directed the city's Emergency Management Department to assess gaps in alert and warning systems in areas with poor cellphone connectivity and then implement a solution to ensure alerts reach people. But that goal was given a "medium" priority level and a long-term timeline, with completion expected sometime in the next 10 years.

Meanwhile the county's Hazard Mitigation Plan, last updated in 2020, did not include a focus on emergency alerts or public notifications. Instead its high-priority goals had to do with educating people about wind's impact on wildfire risk and with community wildfire protection.

Officials at the County's Coordinated Joint Information Center declined to comment other than to say that an independent review of evacuations and emergency notifications is planned and the Office of Emergency Management, County Fire Department and Sheriff's Department plan to fully engage with it.

## **Tiger poachers use fishing boats to smuggle body parts out of Malaysia, study shows**

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Commercial fishing fleets have been playing a key role in trafficking parts of tigers poached in Malaysia, according to research released Wednesday that could help enforcement efforts to save the critically endangered cat.

The fishing boats are part of a network of routes used by sophisticated teams of poachers to move parts of illegally killed Malayan Tigers and other poached animals to Vietnam, according to the study by conservation organizations Panthera and ZSL in conjunction with Malaysia's Sunway University.

Through interviews with more than four dozen people involved in the operations, including poachers and those who brokered sales of the illicit goods, researchers found that fishing boats were able to carry larger consignments, cheaper, and less likely to be checked by customs than land or air routes.

"To really crack a problem and insert the right intervention that's going to have any impact you have to understand the thing inside out," said Panthara's Rob Pickles, the lead author of the study, in a phone interview from Kuala Lumpur. "That's what we hope that this study does — contribute to that depth of understanding of the problem to allow us to tailor the interventions."

From a population estimated at some 3,000 tigers in the middle of the 20th century, the latest estimates are that there are only about 150 of the cats left in Malaysia and they have already gone extinct in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam over the last 25 years.

In addition to poaching, tigers have lost much of their habitat to deforestation, and they have been falling victim in recent years to the canine distemper virus while a major source of food, the wild boar, has been decimated by the African swine fever virus.

"It's their last gasp," Pickles said. "This is the last chance to turn things around."

The tigers live in the forests of peninsular Malaysia, which is connected by land to Thailand to the north. They have also been targeted by poachers from Malaysia, Cambodia and Thailand, but researchers said the Vietnamese teams operate on a "different order of magnitude."

Almost all from the poor, rural and rugged province of Quang Binh, where many took to the jungles to escape relentless American bombing during the Vietnam War, the poachers use well-honed bushcraft skills to live as small teams in the forests for three to five months at a time on poaching excursions.



They capture wild tigers with heavy steel snares made of wires as thick as a person's index finger, as well as other animals.

Once caught, the tigers are killed and processed largely for their bones, which are boiled for days until they become a gelatinous glue-like substance that is pressed into small blocks and sold for perceived medicinal benefits. Claws and teeth are used to make amulets.

As Malaysia went on lockdown during the COVID pandemic, poaching operations came to a near standstill. The researchers were able to use the time to find and interview more than 50 individuals involved in the operations for the study, which was done in two phases concluding in 2024.

Researchers learned that fishing boats were also used to carry bear paws and bile, live civets, wild boar tusks and meat, pangolins, monitor lizards and turtles.

One person told researchers the fishing boats were ideal to send larger items like tiger skins.

"Nobody checks," the interviewee was quoted as saying. "In addition, people can go back by boat so many things also can be brought back by this route."

Malaysia and Vietnam have both been increasing maritime controls recently, making trafficking by fishing boats riskier.

Malaysian authorities have also had success in catching poachers and have substantially increased punishments for wildlife crime in recent years, though the study also found that the managers who send the teams into the forests are rarely caught and can easily recruit replacements.

Researchers also learned that many Vietnamese poachers take on significant debt to travel to Malaysia.

They recommend that in addition to focusing more on fishing boats, authorities should target potential poachers in their home villages in Quang Binh with information about the increasing risks and diminishing returns to try and dissuade them from coming to Malaysia in the first place.

Officials in Malaysia and Vietnam, both of which were celebrating public holidays this week, did not respond to requests for comment on the survey and its recommendations.

"We can't arrest our way out of a problem or over-rely on the criminal justice system," said ZSL's Gopalasamy Reuben Clements, a co-author of the report.

"We need to explore other approaches, such as highly targeted behavioral change interventions, that can run in parallel to arrests and prosecutions."

## **Passenger plane catches fire at South Korean airport. All 176 people on board are evacuated**

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — A passenger plane caught fire before takeoff at an airport in South Korea late Tuesday, but all 176 people on board were safely evacuated, authorities said.

The Airbus plane operated by South Korean airline Air Busan was preparing to leave for Hong Kong when its rear parts caught fire at Gimhae International Airport in the southeast, the Transport Ministry said in a statement.

The plane's 169 passengers, six crewmembers and one engineer were evacuated using an escape slide, the ministry said.

The National Fire Agency said in a release that three people suffered minor injuries during the evacuation. The fire agency said the fire was completely put out at 11:31 p.m., about one hour after it deployed firefighters and fire trucks at the scene.

The cause of the fire wasn't immediately known. The Transport Ministry said the plane is an A321 model.

Tuesday's incident came a month after a Jeju Air passenger plane crashed at Muan International Airport in southern South Korea, killing all but two of the 181 people on board. It was one of the deadliest disasters in South Korea's aviation history.

The Boeing 737-800 skidded off the airport's runway on Dec. 29 after its landing gear failed to deploy, slamming into a concrete structure and bursting into flames. The flight was returning from Bangkok and all of the victims were South Koreans except for two Thai nationals.

The first report on the crash released Monday said authorities have confirmed traces of bird strikes in the plane's engines, though officials haven't determined the cause of the accident.

## Trump plans to sign the Laken Riley Act into law as his administration's first piece of legislation

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Wednesday will sign the Laken Riley Act into law as his administration's first piece of legislation. It mandates the detention and potential deportation of people in the U.S. illegally who are accused of theft and violent crimes before they've actually been convicted.

The measure swiftly passed the Republican-controlled Congress with some Democratic support, despite immigrants rights advocates decrying it as extreme enough to possibly trigger mass roundups of people for offenses as minor as shoplifting.

Trump has made a promised crackdown on illegal immigration unprecedented in the nation's history a centerpiece of his political career, however, and is now suggesting the law might only be the beginning.

"This shows the potential for additional enforcement bills that will help us crack down on criminal aliens and totally restore the rule of law in our country," the president said at a conference of House Republicans held at his Doral golf club in Florida.

The law is named for Laken Riley, a 22-year-old Georgia nursing student who went out for a run in February 2024 and was killed by Jose Antonio Ibarra, a Venezuelan national in the U.S. illegally. Ibarra was found guilty in November and sentenced to life without parole.

"To have a bill of such importance named after her is a great, a great tribute," Trump said. "This new form of crime, criminal, illegal aliens, it's — it's massive, the numbers are massive and you add that to the crime we already had."

The speed at which the act cleared Congress — and the fact that Trump is preparing to triumphantly sign it at the White House surrounded by lawmakers and other supportive, invited guests just nine days after taking office — adds to its potent political symbolism for conservatives. Critics say the measure is using a tragedy to effectively unleash chaos and cruelty while doing little to fight crime or fix an antiquated federal immigration system that hasn't been overhauled in decades.

Under the Laken Riley Act, federal officials are required to detain any immigrant arrested or charged with crimes like theft or assaulting a police officer, or offenses that injure or kill someone. It further gives legal standing to state attorneys general to sue the U.S. government for harm caused by federal immigration decisions — potentially allowing the leaders of conservative states to help dictate immigration policy set by Washington.

Ibarra had been arrested for illegal entry in September 2022 near El Paso, Texas, amid an unprecedented surge in migration, and released to pursue his case in immigration court. Federal officials say he was arrested by New York police in August 2023 for child endangerment and released. Police say he was also suspected of theft in Georgia in October 2023 — all of which occurred before Riley's killing.

"This is the right thing to do," House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said after the act cleared the House. "It's always good when the right thing is also the popular thing."

Some Democrats, however, have questioned the act's constitutionality. Immigrant advocates are bracing for mass detentions that they say will trigger subsequent, costly construction of immigration lockup facilities to house the people arrested.

"They don't just get to celebrate. They get to use this for their mass deportation agenda," Naureen Shah, deputy director of government affairs in the equality division of the American Civil Liberties Union, said of the act's supporters.

The ALCU says the act can allow people to be "mandatorily locked up — potentially for years — because at some point in their lives, perhaps decades ago, they were accused of nonviolent offenses."

Hannah Flamm, interim senior director of policy at the International Refugee Assistance Project, said the law violates immigrants' basic rights by allowing for detaining people who haven't been charged with,

much less convicted of, wrongdoing. Still, she said, "The latent fear from the election cycle of looking soft on crime snowballed into aiding and abetting Trump's total conflation of immigration with crime."

Flamm said the act is likely to be challenged in court on its parameters directing mandatory detentions, as well as its granting legal standing to state attorneys general in immigration cases and policy. But she also predicted that a need to pay for more immigration detention centers will give advocates a chance to challenge how federal funds are appropriated to cover those costs.

"I think it is pivotal to understand: This bill, framed as connected to a tragic death, is pretext to fortify a mass deportation system," Flamm said.

The signing of the Laken Riley Act follows a flurry of first-week executive orders by Trump that are designed to better seal off the U.S.-Mexico border and eventually move to deport millions of immigrants without permanent U.S. legal status. The new administration has also canceled refugee resettlement and says it may attempt to prosecute local law enforcement officials who do not enforce his new immigration policies.

"We're tracking down the illegal alien criminals and we're detaining them and we're throwing them the hell out of our country," Trump said. "We have no apologies, and we're moving forward very fast."

## **Fed likely to hold rates steady despite Trump call for cuts as it awaits tariff, immigration changes**

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump may want lower interest rates, but the Federal Reserve will almost certainly keep its benchmark interest rate unchanged at its two-day policy meeting that ends Wednesday.

It is likely to be a quiet start to an eventful year for the central bank. Trump said last week in Davos, Switzerland that he would bring down energy prices, then "demand" that the Fed lower borrowing costs.

Later, when asked by reporters if he expected the Fed to listen to him, he said, "yes." Presidents in recent decades have avoided publicly pressuring the Fed out of deference to its political independence.

Outside of a U.S. President bending norms, the Fed also faces challenges in achieving its economic objectives. Inflation remains above its 2% target: Its preferred measure is at 2.4%, though core prices — considered a better gauge of where inflation is headed — rose 2.8% in November from a year ago.

Fed officials, led by Chair Jerome Powell, want to thread a moving needle: By keeping borrowing costs higher, the Fed hopes to slow borrowing and spending enough to reduce inflation, but without causing a painful recession.

Powell said in December that the central bank has entered a "new phase," in which it expects to move more deliberately after cutting its key rate to 4.3%, from 5.3% in the final three meetings of 2024. In December, Fed officials signaled they may reduce their rate just twice more this year. Goldman Sachs economists believes those cuts won't happen until June and December.

A cut in March is still possible, though financial markets' futures pricing puts the odds of that happening at just one-third.

As a result, American households and businesses are unlikely to see much relief from high borrowing costs anytime soon. The average rate on a 30-year mortgage slipped to just below 7% last week after rising for five straight weeks. The costs of borrowing money have remained high economywide even after the Fed reduced its benchmark rate.

That is because investors expect healthy economic growth and stubborn inflation will forestall future rate cuts. They recently bid up the 10-year Treasury above 4.80%, its highest level since 2023.

Another reason for caution among Fed policymakers this year is that they will want to evaluate any changes in economic policy by the Trump administration. Trump has said he could slap tariffs of 25% on imports from Canada and Mexico as early as Feb. 1. During his presidential campaign he threatened to impose taxes on all imports.

The Trump administration has also said it will carry out mass deportations of migrants, which could push

up inflation by reducing the economy's ability to produce goods and services. At the same time, some economists say Trump's promises to deregulate the economy could lower prices over time.

When Trump imposed tariffs on a limited number of imports in 2018 and 2019, Fed economists expected the biggest impact to fall on economic growth, with the inflationary impact being relatively minor. As a result, when growth did slow, the Fed ended up cutting its key rate in 2019, rather than raising it to fight off any inflationary impact.

On Wednesday, Fed officials could also change the statement that they release after each meeting to upgrade their assessment of the labor market, a signal that rate cuts may be delayed.

In December, the statement included a mildly pessimistic take: "Labor market conditions have generally eased, and the unemployment rate has moved up but remains low." In the summer and fall, employers slowed their hiring. The rise in the unemployment rate had unnerved Fed officials and was a big reason they reduced their key rate by an unusually large half-percentage point in September.

Earlier this month, Fed governor Chris Waller cited weaker hiring as evidence that the Fed's key rate is "restrictive," meaning it is acting as a brake on the economy and should bring down inflation over time. If rates are restrictive, that means the Fed would have more room to cut them if inflation were to decline further.

Yet this month, just a few days after Waller's remarks, the December jobs report showed that hiring accelerated and the unemployment rate slipped to a low 4.1% from 4.2%.

The healthier employment numbers suggested that hiring has at least levelled off. If it stays as strong as last month, the improved job gains would suggest the Fed's rate isn't restrictive at all, and few, if any, rate cuts are needed.

## **Trump offering federal workers buyouts with about 8 months' pay in effort to shrink government**

By MARK SHERMAN and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration announced Tuesday that it is offering buyouts to all federal employees who opt to leave their jobs by next week — an unprecedented move to shrink the U.S. government at breakneck speed.

A memo from the Office of Personnel Management, the government's human resources agency, also said it would begin subjecting all federal employees to "enhanced standards of suitability and conduct" and ominously warned of future downsizing. The email sent to millions of employees said those who leave their posts voluntarily will receive about eight months of salary, but they have to choose to do so by Feb. 6.

President Donald Trump has built a political career around promising to disrupt Washington, and vowed that his second administration would go far further in shaking up traditional political norms than his first did. Still, the repercussions of so many government workers being invited to leave their jobs were difficult to calculate.

Katie Miller, who serves on an advisory board to the Department of Government Efficiency, a special Trump administration department headed by Tesla CEO Elon Musk and tasked with shrinking the size of government, posted on X, "This email is being sent to more than TWO MILLION federal employees."

The federal government employed more than 3 million people as of November last year, which accounted for nearly 1.9% of the nation's entire civilian workforce, according to the Pew Research Center. The average tenure for a federal employee is nearly 12 years, according to a Pew analysis of data from OPM.

Even a fraction of the workforce accepting buyouts could send shockwaves through the economy and trigger widespread disruptions throughout society as a whole, triggering wide-ranging — and as yet unknowable — implications for the delivery, timeliness and effectiveness of federal services across the nation.

Untold numbers of front-line health workers in the Veterans Affairs Department, officials who process loans for homebuyers or small businesses, and contractors who help procure the next generation of military weaponry could all head for the exits at once. It could also mean losing experienced food inspectors and scientists who test the water supply — while disrupting everything from air travel and consumer product



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protections.

In response, American Federation of Government Employees union President Everett Kelley said it should not be viewed as voluntary buyouts, but pressuring workers not considered loyal to the new administration to vacate their jobs.

"Purging the federal government of dedicated career federal employees will have vast, unintended consequences that will cause chaos for the Americans who depend on a functioning federal government," Kelley said in a statement. "Between the flurry of anti-worker executive orders and policies, it is clear that the Trump administration's goal is to turn the federal government into a toxic environment where workers cannot stay even if they want to."

In its emailed memo detailing its plan, OPM lists four directives that it says Trump is mandating for the federal workforce going forward — including that most workers return to their offices full-time.

"The substantial majority of federal employees who have been working remotely since Covid will be required to return to their physical offices five days a week," it reads. That echoes Trump, who said of federal employees over the weekend: "You have to go to your office and work. Otherwise you're not going to have a job."

The memo also says Trump "will insist on excellence at every level," and while some parts of the government's workforce may increase under his administration, "The majority of federal agencies are likely to be downsized."

Finally, it says, the "federal workforce should be comprised of employees who are reliable, loyal, trustworthy, and who strive for excellence in their daily work."

"Employees will be subject to enhanced standards of suitability and conduct as we move forward," the memo reads.

The emailed message includes a "deferred resignation letter" for federal employees to begin leaving their posts.

"If you resign under this program, you will retain all pay and benefits regardless of your daily workload and will be exempted from all applicable in-person work requirements until September 30," it says.

The email even includes instructions on how to accept, stating: "If you wish to resign: Select 'Reply' to this email. You must reply from your government account." It adds: "Type the word 'Resign' into the body of this email and hit 'send.'"

Meanwhile, OPM has released guidance for an executive order Trump signed on the first day of his second term known as "Schedule Career/Policy." It replaces Schedule F, an order Trump signed late in his first term that sought to reclassify thousands of federal employees and make them political appointees without the same job security protections.

President Joe Biden rescinded Trump's Schedule F order almost immediately upon taking office in 2021, and under his administration, OPM issued a new rule last year designed to make it more difficult to fire many federal employees.

That move was seen as a safeguard against using a new Schedule F order to help carry out the key goals of Project 2025, a sweeping plan by a conservative Washington think tank to dismiss large swaths of the federal workforce in favor of more conservative alternatives while also cutting back on the overall size of government.

But that hasn't stopped the Trump administration from swiftly moving to gut the federal workforce and leave employees with little recourse to protest firings or reassignments.

Trump's OPM on Monday set deadlines for agencies to begin to recommend workers for reclassification. Agency heads are being instructed to establish a contact person no later than Wednesday and begin to submit interim personnel recommendations within 90 days.

"Agencies are encouraged to submit recommendations on a rolling basis before this date," Charles Ezell, the acting director of OPM, said in a memo.

Perhaps more stunning, the Trump personnel office simply did away with the Biden administration's 2024 regulation to better protect federal workers. Monday's memo said Trump's new executive order used the president's authority "to directly nullify these regulations."

## This is what one family in Gaza returned home to after 15 months of war

By ABDEL KAREEM HANA, WAFAA SHURAFU and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

BEIT LAHIYA, Gaza Strip (AP) — The grove of orange, olive and palm trees that once stood in front of Ne'man Abu Jarad's house was bulldozed away. The roses and jasmine flowers on the roof and in the garden, which he lovingly watered so his family could enjoy their fragrance, were also gone.

The house itself was a damaged, hollowed-out shell. But after 15 months of brutal war, it stood.

At the sight of it Monday, Ne'man; his wife, Majida; and three of their six daughters dropped the bags they had been lugging since dawn, fell to their knees and prayed, whispering, "Praise be to God, praise be to God." The sunset blazed orange in the sky above.

After 477 days of hell — fleeing the length of the Gaza Strip, hiding from bombardment, sweltering in tents, scrounging for food and water, losing their possessions — they had finally returned home.

"Our joy is unmatched by any other, not the joy of success, of a marriage or of a birth," Majida said. "This is a joy that can't be described in words, in writing or in any expression."

In October, at the one-year anniversary of the Gaza war, The Associated Press traced the Abu Jarad family's flight around the territory seeking safety. They were eight of the roughly 1.8 million Palestinians driven from their homes by Israel's massive campaign of retaliation against Hamas following the militants' Oct. 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel.

Like many families, they were displaced multiple times. Ne'man, Majida and their daughters — the youngest in first grade, the oldest in her early 20s — fled their home at the northernmost part of Gaza hours after Israeli bombardment began. They would move seven times in total, fleeing all the way to Gaza's southernmost city Rafah.

Each time, their conditions worsened. By October 2024, they were languishing in a sprawling tent camp near the southern city of Khan Younis, exhausted and depressed, with little hope of seeing home again.

Hope suddenly revived when Israel and Hamas reached a long-awaited ceasefire earlier this month. On Jan. 19, the first day of the truce, Majida began packing up their clothes, food and other belongings. On Sunday, the announcement came: The next day, Israeli troops would pull back from two main roads, allowing Palestinians to return to the north.

Since Monday, more than 375,000 Palestinians have made their way back to northern Gaza, many of them on foot.

The Abu Jarads set off Monday from their tent at 5 a.m., loading bags stuffed with their belongings into a car. The driver took them to the edge of the Netzarim Corridor, the swath of land across Gaza that Israeli forces had turned into a military zone that — until this week — had barred any returns north.

There, they got out and walked, joining the massive crowds making their way down the coastal road. For around 8 kilometers (5 miles), the 49-year-old Ne'man carried one sack on his back, held another in his arms, and two bags dangled from the crooks of his elbows. They stopped frequently, to rest, rearrange bags, and drop items along the way.

"The road is really hard," Majida told an AP journalist who accompanied them on the journey. "But our joy for the return makes us forget we're tired. Every meter we walk, our joy gives us strength to continue."

Reaching the southern outskirts of Gaza City, they hired a van. But it quickly ran out of fuel, and they waited more than an hour before they found another one. Driving through the city, they got their first look at the war's devastating impact in the north.

Over 15 months, Israel launched repeated offensives in Gaza City and surrounding areas, trying to crush Hamas fighters who often operated in densely populated neighborhoods. After each assault, militants would regroup, and a new assault would follow.

The van made its way down city streets strewn with rubble, lined with buildings that were damaged husks or had been reduced to piles of concrete.

"They destroyed even more in this area," Ne'man said, staring out the window as they left Gaza City and entered the towns of Beit Lahiya and Beit Hanoun — scene of one of Israel's most ferocious offensives in

the last three months before the ceasefire.

As the sun began to set, the van dropped them off at the edge of their neighborhood. Ne'man's daughters stood in shock. One gaped, her hands on her cheeks. Her sister pointed out at the field of flattened houses. They walked the last few hundred meters, over a landscape of rutted, bulldozed dirt.

Trudging as fast as he could under the bags draping from his body, Ne'man — a taxi driver before the war — repeated over and over in excitement, "God is great, God is great. To God is all thanks."

Their home still stood, sort of — a hollow shell in a row of damaged buildings. After they prayed in front of it, Ne'man leaned on the bare concrete wall of his house and kissed it. To his joy he discovered that one flowering vine in front of the house had miraculously survived. He immediately set about examining and arranging its tendrils.

One of the girls dashed in through the now doorless front entrance. "Oh Lord, oh Lord," her gasps came from the darkness inside. Then she began to cry, as if all the shock, sorrow, happiness and relief were gushing out of her.

Like others streaming back into northern Gaza, the Abu Jarads will face the question of how to survive in the ruins of cities decimated by war. Water and food remain scarce, leaving the population still reliant on humanitarian aid, which is being ramped up under the ceasefire. There is no electricity. Tens of thousands are homeless.

Adjoining the Abu Jarads' home, Ne'man's brother's three-story house is now a pile of concrete wreckage after it was destroyed by an airstrike. It damaged Ne'man's home as it collapsed, "but, thank God, there is an undamaged room which we will live in," he said. He vows to repair what is damaged.

Grief from the war lays heavily on him, Ne'man said. His uncle lost his home, and several of his uncle's children were killed. Several of his neighbors' homes were destroyed. Ne'man said he will have to walk several kilometers (miles) to find water, just like he did in the displacement camps.

"Once again, we will live through suffering and fatigue."

## Trump order aims to end federal support for gender transitions for those under 19

By ZEKE MILLER, GEOFF MULVIHILL and HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Tuesday signed an executive order aimed at cutting federal support for gender transitions for people under age 19, his latest move to roll back protections for transgender people across the country.

"It is the policy of the United States that it will not fund, sponsor, promote, assist, or support the so-called 'transition' of a child from one sex to another, and it will rigorously enforce all laws that prohibit or limit these destructive and life-altering procedures," the order says.

The order directs that federally-run insurance programs, including TRICARE for military families and Medicaid, exclude coverage for such care and calls on the Department of Justice to vigorously pursue litigation and legislation to oppose the practice.

Medicaid programs in some states cover gender-affirming care. The new order suggests that the practice could end, and targets hospitals and universities that receive federal money and provide the care.

The language in the executive order — using words such as "maiming," "sterilizing" and "mutilation" — contradicts what is typical for gender-affirming care in the United States. It also labels guidance from the World Professional Association for Transgender Health as "junk science."

On his Truth Social platform, Trump called gender-affirming care "barbaric medical procedures."

Major medical groups such as the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics support access to care.

Young people who persistently identify as a gender that differs from their sex assigned at birth are first evaluated by a team of professionals. Some may try a social transition, involving changing a hairstyle or pronouns. Some may later also receive puberty blockers or hormones. Surgery is extremely rare for minors.

"It is deeply unfair to play politics with people's lives and strip transgender young people, their families

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and their providers of the freedom to make necessary health care decisions," said Human Rights Campaign President Kelley Robinson.

The order encourages Congress to adopt a law allowing those who receive gender-affirming care and come to regret it, or their parents, to sue the providers.

It also directs the Justice Department to prioritize investigating states that protect access to gender-affirming care and "facilitate stripping custody from parents" who oppose the treatments for their children. Some Democratic-controlled states have adopted laws that seek to protect doctors who provide gender-affirming care to patients who travel from states where it's banned for minors.

Lambda Legal promised swift legal action.

Michel Lee Garrett, a trans woman whose teenage child only partially identifies as a girl and uses they/them pronouns, said such policies aim to erase trans people from public life but will never succeed. Her child has not elected to pursue a medical transition, but the mother from State College, Pennsylvania, said she won't stop fighting to preserve that option for her child and others.

"I'll always support my child's needs, regardless of what policies may be in place or what may come ... even if it meant trouble for me," Lee Garrett said.

For Howl Hall, an 18-year-old freshman at Eastern Washington University, taking testosterone not only changed his body but dramatically improved his experience with depression. With that treatment now under threat, Hall said he's concerned that getting off testosterone would hurt his mental health.

"I would be alive, but I wouldn't be living," Hall said. "I wouldn't be living my life in a productive way at all. I can guarantee that I would be failing all of my classes if I was even showing up to them."

The push is the latest by Trump to reverse Biden administration policies protecting transgender people and their care. On Monday, Trump directed the Pentagon to conduct a review that is likely to lead to them being barred from military service. A group of active-duty military personnel sued over that on Tuesday.

Hours after taking office last week, Trump signed another order that seeks to define sex as only male or female, not recognizing transgender, nonbinary or intersex people or the idea that gender can be fluid. Already that's resulted in the State Department halting issuing passports with an "X" gender marker, forcing transgender people to apply for travel documents with markers that don't match their identities.

Trump said he would address these issues during his campaign last year, and his actions could prove widely divisive.

In the November election, voters were slightly more likely to oppose than support laws that ban gender-affirming medical treatment, such as puberty blockers and hormone therapy, for minors under the age of 18 who identify as transgender, according to AP VoteCast. About half of voters, 52%, were opposed, but 47% said they were in favor.

Trump's voters were much more likely to support bans on transgender care: About 6 in 10 Trump voters favored such laws.

"It's very clear that this order, in combination with the other orders that we've seen over the past week, are meant to not protect anyone in this country, but rather to single-mindedly drive out transgender people of all ages from all walks of civic life," said Harper Seldin, a staff attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union's LGBTQ & HIV Project.

Seldin said the ACLU is reviewing the order "to understand what, if anything, has immediate effect versus what needs to go through continued agency action."

Even as transgender people have gained visibility and acceptance on some fronts, they've become major targets for social conservatives. In recent years, at least 26 states have adopted laws restricting or banning gender-affirming medical care for transgender minors. Most of those states face lawsuits, including one over Tennessee's ban that's pending before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Republican-controlled states have also moved to keep transgender women and girls from competing in women's or girls' sports and to dictate which bathrooms transgender people can use, particularly in schools.

"These policies are not serving anyone," said Shelby Chestnut, executive director of the Transgender Law Center. "They're only creating confusion and fear for all people."



## Head Start and Medicaid providers hit glitches as Trump freezes federal money

By MORIAH BALINGIT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As President Donald Trump paused federal grants and loans in a far-reaching directive, early childhood education centers and states discovered Tuesday they could no longer access money they rely on to provide care for some of the nation's neediest families and children.

Across the country, staff trying to access Medicaid and Head Start funding through payment websites Tuesday morning were locked out, leaving some scrambling to figure out how they would cover payroll and pay vendors and rent. But the White House said hours later that funding for those programs should not have been affected by the freeze. By late Tuesday, some states and Head Start providers reported their access to the sites had been restored.

The confusion left some Head Start centers weighing whether to close. Early Flowers Learning, which operates 17 Head Start preschools with 600 students in southwestern Michigan, announced it would not open its doors on Wednesday because it could not pay staff — only to learn that website access had been restored.

"I worry about them, you know, certainly trying to hold it together right now, thinking about some of the children that we serve who might not have access to breakfast and lunch if they don't have a place to go," said Chanda Hillman said, executive director of Early Flowers Learning.

The funding freeze was temporarily halted by a federal judge late Tuesday, but the disruption showed how reliant programs serving the most vulnerable Americans are on the federal government. The White House would not elaborate on the cause of the outages — and whether they were connected to the directive.

Officials in several states said their staff struggled to access the website used to request funds for Medicaid, a federal program that provides health care coverage for about 80 million of the poorest of Americans, including millions of children.

Commenting on issues with the Medicaid site, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said on X that the administration is "aware of the Medicaid website portal outage."

"We have confirmed no payments have been affected — they are still being processed and sent," Leavitt wrote. "We expect the portal will be back online shortly."

On the Head Start payment management system website, some providers got messages that read "Proxy Error" or "System Maintenance in progress, Interactive Access has been shut down."

In Mississippi's Harrison County, staff at an Early Head Start program messaged parents to come pick up their children early after discovering they could not access the money to stay open.

"Our families are being punched in the gut three times from different angles," program director Katina Spaulding said. "This is so heartless."

The center later told families that it would reopen Wednesday after learning its funding would not be halted.

In Oregon, Gov. Tina Kotek, a Democrat, said the state's Medicaid portal was shut down and that the state health agency couldn't log on to seek or receive reimbursements for health services provided to the program's low-income recipients.

"I can tell you that when federal funds that are meant to serve the most vulnerable Oregonians are suspended or unavailable, that has an impact on Oregonians, and it's a dereliction of the federal government's duty to protect Americans," she said.

By the end of the day Tuesday, Head Start operators expressed relief but said they remained uneasy about the turn of events. Hillman said she was still awaiting confirmation that her federal grant would be renewed.

If it's not, she will have to once again have to shut down the preschools — this time for good.

## Congo tries to slow the assault of Rwanda-backed rebels amid reports of dead bodies in the streets

By JUSTIN KABUMBA and CHINEDU ASADU Associated Press

GOMA, Congo (AP) — Congolese security forces on Tuesday tried to slow the advance of Rwanda-backed M23 rebels who say they have captured Goma after entering eastern Congo's largest city, as U.N. officials reported violence, looting and bodies in the streets.

The officials said hospitals are overwhelmed in Goma, a regional trade and humanitarian hub that is now a refuge for hundreds of thousands fleeing gunfire and shelling in the major escalation of one of Africa's longest conflicts. The violence echoed far from Goma as protesters in the country's capital attacked at least 10 embassies, including those of France and the U.S., which urged citizens to leave the city.

Congo's Foreign Minister Thérèse Kayikwamba Wagner told an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council that the protesters' damage to embassies were "sincerely regrettable incidents." She said Congo respects the principles governing diplomatic relations, and reassured country that the government "has taken all necessary measures to ensure the protection of the accredited diplomatic missions" in the country.

The M23 rebels are one of about 100 armed groups vying for a foothold in the conflict-battered North Kivu province — which includes Goma — rich in minerals critical to much of the world's technology.

United Nations official says reports of rapes, looting

There were reports of gender-based violence and rape committed by fighters, looting of property, including a humanitarian warehouse, and humanitarian and health facilities being hit in the city, U.N. humanitarian affairs office spokesman Jens Laerke said at a media briefing on Tuesday.

"The humanitarian situation in and around Goma remains extremely worrying, and this morning (there were) heavy small arms fire and mortar fire across the city and the presence of many dead bodies in the streets," said Laerke, adding that hospitals are "struggling to manage the influx of wounded people."

Many continued to flee across the border into Rwanda, braving gunfire and heavy rains and caught in between shootouts on both sides from the Congolese soldiers and the rebels.

"What we want is this war to come to an end," said Christian Bahati, a Congolese teacher among hundreds now sheltering in the Rwandan town of Gisenyi. "You can see the level of frustration. Congolese people are victims, but now they find themselves seeking refuge from the aggressor."

Growing anger in the far-away capital

Dozens of demonstrators, meanwhile, looted and set fires to parts of at least 10 foreign embassy buildings far off in the capital, Kinshasa, including those of Rwanda, U.S., France, Belgium and Kenya.

The protesters demanded that the international community condemn Rwanda over its role in the conflict. "We denounce the hypocrisy of the international community," said Timothée Tshishimbi, one of the protesters. "They must tell Rwanda to stop this adventure."

The attacks were condemned by the respective countries as well as the Congolese government, which said it has reinforced the security at the embassies.

Several countries, including the United States, United Kingdom and France have condemned Rwanda for the rebel advance. The African Union Peace and Security Council demanded the M23 and other rebel groups "immediately and unconditionally withdraw and cease their attacks and permanently disband and lay down their arms."

M23 rebels emboldened, plan to set up administration in Goma

It was unclear how much of Goma is controlled by the M23 rebels, though analysts say they are more emboldened than in 2012 when they temporarily took over the city before being forced to pull out under international pressure.

They resurfaced in late 2021 with increasing support from Rwanda, according to Congo's government and U.N. experts. Rwanda has denied such support although U.N. experts estimate there are up to 4,000 Rwandan forces in Congo.

"Since morning, we have heard bomb explosions and crackling bullets," Sam Luwawa, a resident of Goma, said of the fighting in the city. "So far we cannot say who really controls the city."

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Seventeen peacekeepers and foreign soldiers have been killed in the fighting, according to U.N. and army officials.

Manzi Ngarambe, a representative for the M23 diaspora, told the AP that the group is in control of Goma and plans to set up an administration in the city so people can continue living normal lives and displaced people can return home.

"There will be no bloodbath, we want to live in peace," Ngarambe said. "Right now we're going to tell our people all over the world (to) go back home."

Ngarambe said they would be willing to sit at the table with Congolese officials and denied that they were being supported by Rwanda.

Rwandan Foreign Minister Olivier Nduhungirehe said that Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi "will have to accept talks with M23 to end the situation once and for all."

Rwanda's goal in Congo is to protect its borders against attacks, army spokesperson Brig. Gen. Ronald Rwivanga told the AP, adding that appropriate measures would be "all-encompassing," including the use of water, air and land defense.

Rwandan President Paul Kagame recently accused Congo of enlisting Hutu rebels and former militiamen that it blames for the 1994 genocide.

"The very people who murdered people here in Rwanda still exist, are still armed, are still practicing the ideology of genocide in our neighborhood, in eastern Congo ... supported by government ... on the watch of this international community," Kagame said earlier this month while meeting with diplomats.

A dire humanitarian situation, risk of regional war

The humanitarian situation in Goma "is extremely, extremely worrying," Bruno Lemarquis, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator for Congo, told reporters in a video news conference on Monday.

Several shells struck the Charité Maternelle Hospital in central Goma, "killing and injuring civilians, including newborns and pregnant women," Lemarquis said on Monday, describing active combat zones in all areas of the city.

Aid groups are unable to reach displaced people who rely on them for food and other necessities.

"Key roads surrounding Goma are blocked, and the city's airport can no longer be used for evacuation and humanitarian efforts. Power and water have reportedly been cut to many areas of the city," said David Munkley, head of operations in eastern Congo for the Christian aid group World Vision.

Some analysts worry about the risk of a regional war if peace efforts led by Kenya fail. Past attempts at dialogue between Congolese and Rwandan leaders have failed, including in December when the meeting of the two leaders was canceled.

Congo might seek support from countries like South Africa — whose troops are among foreign militaries in Congo — while Rwanda might be motivated to continue backing the M23 rebels, said Murithi Mutiga, program director for Africa at the Crisis Group.

"The risk of a regional confrontation has never been higher," Mutiga said.

## US education agency investigating Denver schools over all-gender bathroom

By JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press/Report for America

DENVER (AP) — The U.S. Education Department said Tuesday it was investigating Denver Public Schools for alleged discrimination after the district converted a girl's restroom on the second floor of a high school into an all-gender restroom while leaving another bathroom exclusive to boys.

The department's accusation that the move may violate of Title IX, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, appears to be unprecedented, and it marks a sharp departure from the department's investigations under former President Joe Biden.

The Democrat's administration interpreted Title IX to include LGBTQ+ protections, though the policy was later overturned by a federal judge.

"Let me be clear: it is a new day in America, and under President Trump, (the Office for Civil Rights) will

not tolerate discrimination of any kind," said Craig Trainor, the acting assistant secretary for civil rights, in a news release.

Denver Public Schools said in a statement that the bathroom was converted as a result of a student-led process, and it is designed with 12-foot-tall partitions for privacy and security.

"This restroom serves all students, including those who may feel uncomfortable in gender-specific facilities and aligns with our values of supporting every student," said Scott Pribble, a spokesperson for Denver Public Schools. He added that East High School also has restrooms for male and female students.

Brett Sokolow, the president of the Association of Title IX Administrators, said that questions about the restroom have not yet been tested.

"They are arguing that an all-gender restroom isn't comparable to a single-gender restroom," Sokolow said. "You'd have to establish that somehow you have a right to a single-sex bathroom, and while the Trump administration may believe that, I don't know if that will be upheld by the courts."

The Department of Education investigates thousands of Title IX complaints every year, mostly dealing with athletics. Nearly all cases have been resolved through voluntary resolutions with schools and colleges, though the agency has authority to terminate federal funding for institutions that violate civil rights laws.

In a 2024 case, the department's Office of Civil Rights investigated an undisclosed school district after a transgender middle schooler allegedly faced repeated harassment, including being told she was in the wrong bathroom. The district reached an agreement to end the case, adding staff training and inviting the student to join an LGBTQ outreach committee.

## **New Homeland Security secretary joins federal agents to tout immigrant arrests in NYC**

By DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem joined federal agents Tuesday in New York City to announce the arrests of immigrants wanted on criminal charges, including a man accused of kidnapping who was seen on a viral video entering a Colorado apartment with reputed gang members.

Noem was the latest high-ranking official from President Donald Trump's administration to tout the president's ramped-up immigration enforcement in a city where arrests were being made. Border czar Tom Homan and acting Deputy Attorney General Emil Bove were in Chicago on Sunday as federal agents made arrests there.

"Arresting some criminal aliens this morning in NYC — thank you to the brave officers involved," Noem posted on X. "Criminal alien with kidnapping, assault & burglary charges is now in custody — thanks to @ICE. Dirtbags like this will continue to be removed from our streets."

An operation in the Bronx early Tuesday snared Anderson Zambrano-Pacheco, 26, who authorities said was part of a group of men, including members of the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua, who entered an apartment in Aurora, Colorado, last summer and were recorded on a widely viewed video.

The charges were brought by local authorities in Colorado. It was not immediately clear what would happen next for Zambrano-Pacheco. Two other men who police said were in the video were arrested in New York in November. They are still in ICE custody.

The incident caught President Donald Trump's attention during the presidential campaign, and he announced a plan called "Operation Aurora" to target migrant gangs. The video led Trump to claim that the Denver suburb had been taken over by the gang, which city officials denied.

In an arrest warrant, Aurora police said Zambrano-Pacheco was also wanted in a kidnapping in which at least 20 armed men abducted and threatened two people in late June. In addition, police said Zambrano-Pacheco was with a group of armed men before a shooting occurred shortly after the apartment incident that was caught on video.

It was not immediately clear if he had a lawyer or if he was a member of Tren de Aragua.

Local and federal authorities, including Aurora police and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, investigated the apartment video incident for months beginning when Joe Biden was still president.



New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, said Tuesday's arrests did not appear to be part of a "wholesale raid," but rather an operation targeting specific people accused of crimes.

"I want to be clear, there's always been ICE raids in the state of New York, even in the past. This is not a new dynamic," she said.

Zambrano-Pacheco is the fifth person to be arrested in connection with the Aurora apartment incident. The video showed six armed men, including at least some people identified as Tren de Aragua members by federal authorities, entering the apartment shortly before a fatal shooting outside the complex.

In Chicago, city leaders criticized the highly publicized enforcement operations that started over the weekend in the nation's third-largest city. That included the surprising decision to allow daytime television psychologist "Dr. Phil" McGraw to livestream immigrant arrests alongside Homan.

"This desire to popularize fear is unconscionable and abhorrent," Mayor Brandon Johnson said Tuesday at a City Hall news conference alongside Police Superintendent Larry Snelling, city lawyers and others. "We're talking about people's lives."

Johnson defended the city's strong sanctuary protections that bar Chicago police from cooperating with federal immigration agents. Chicago has been a so-called sanctuary city for decades and has strengthened those protections several times, including during Trump's first term.

ICE has offered few details about the operation in Chicago, including the number of arrests. The agency did not return a message seeking comment Tuesday.

Snelling said Chicago police have communicated with federal agents but did not participate in the operation or cooperate. He estimated roughly 100 people were taken into custody.

In other developments, authorities said Tuesday that none of the 41 people taken into ICE custody following a weekend raid in Colorado are likely to face drug or gun charges. The Sunday raid targeted drug trafficking by Tren de Aragua at a makeshift nightclub near Denver.

The people who had gathered dropped their drugs and guns before agents got inside, making it hard to connect the items to specific people, according to a spokesperson for the Drug Enforcement Administration, Steffan Tubbs. The drugs found were amounts for personal use, he said.

Back in the Bronx, no one answered the door at apartment 1A by the entrance to the building where Zambrano-Pacheco was detained. But Richard Egu, 50, who lives in a third-floor unit, said he was roused from sleep by the commotion around 5 a.m.

Egu, a correctional officer who is originally from Nigeria and has been a naturalized citizen for more than 15 years, said he didn't venture out to investigate and did not know the man who was arrested.

He said he understood the need to arrest and deport those in the country illegally who commit crimes, but he also worries about the effect such enforcement will have in the community.

"You need to give immigrants a chance. These people are already here," he said. "Figure out the ones who are committing the crimes. Don't just judge all immigrants as criminals."

## **Firings, freezes and layoffs: A look at Trump's moves against federal employees and programs**

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

CHAPIN, S.C. (AP) — Changeover among federal government agencies is normal when a new administration comes to Washington, with presidents regularly dismissing appointees selected by predecessors from opposing political parties. But President Donald Trump has implemented sweeping changes in the first days of his second administration, from firing career agency employees to freezing trillions in federal grant funds and halting diversity, equity and inclusion programs that could result in wide-ranging layoffs.

At least 240 employees are known to have been fired, reassigned, or designated to be laid off. Thousands of employees could be affected by other moves, such as a federal employee buyout offer, or the grant funds pause.

Here's a comprehensive look at Trump's actions so far:

Federal employee buyouts

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On Tuesday, the White House abruptly began offering buyouts to all federal employees who opt to leave their jobs by next week, according to a memo from the Office of Personnel Management, the government's human resources agency.

The memo, which noted that employees who leave their posts voluntarily will receive about seven months of salary — but must choose to do so by Feb. 6 — listed four directives it said Trump is mandating for the federal workforce, including that most workers return to their offices full-time.

The potential large-scale reduction in the federal workforce could have wide-ranging — and as yet unknowable — implications for impacting the delivery, timeliness and effectiveness of federal services across the nation.

The federal government employs more than 3 million people, which makes it roughly the 15th largest workforce in the nation. The average tenure for a federal employee is 11.8 years, according to an analysis by the Pew Research Center of data from the Office of Personnel Management.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

The federal agency that enforces laws against workplace discrimination, the EEOC describes itself as a bipartisan commission comprised of five members, all appointed by presidents. On Tuesday, a law firm posted on social media that it was representing Charlotte Burrows, a commissioner who had been fired on Monday by the Trump administration.

In a statement issued through the firm, Burrows said that she had been appointed in 2015, serving under Democratic Presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden, as well as during Trump's first term. According to Burrows, her third term was set to expire in July 2028.

Burrows also noted that Jocelyn Samuels, another commission member appointed by a Democratic president — Biden — had also been fired as Trump took office, saying their removals were "unprecedented and will undermine the efforts of this independent agency to do the important work of protecting employees from discrimination, supporting employers' compliance efforts, and expanding public awareness and understanding of federal employment laws."

Inspectors general

Each of the federal government's largest agencies has its own inspector general who is supposed to conduct objective audits, prevent fraud and promote efficiency.

Trump has fired at least 17 of them across the federal government, including inspectors he appointed in his first term. At least one Democratic appointee — Michael Horowitz, appointed to the post at the Justice Department by Obama — was spared.

Trump confirmed the move in a conversation with reporters aboard Air Force One on Saturday, claiming, "it's a very common thing to do," and saying that he would "put good people in there that will be very good."

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer called the firings a "chilling purge," while GOP Sen. Lindsey Graham, a top Trump ally, acknowledged that the firings may have violated the law but said: "Just tell them you need to follow the law next time."

Federal prosecutors

It's normal for politically appointed U.S. attorneys to be replaced, but not as standard for career prosecutors to be ousted.

The Justice Department said Monday that it had fired more than a dozen employees who worked on criminal prosecutions of Trump, abrupt terminations targeting career prosecutors who worked on special counsel Jack Smith's team investigating Trump. The firings were effective immediately.

By tradition, career employees remain with the department across presidential administrations regardless of their involvement in sensitive investigations.

Multiple senior career officials were also reassigned.

It was not immediately clear which prosecutors were affected by the order, or how many who worked on the investigations into Trump remained with the department as Trump took office last week. It was also not immediately known how many of the fired prosecutors intended to challenge the terminations by arguing that the department had cast aside civil service protections afforded to federal employees.

National Security Council

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The National Security Council provides national security and foreign policy advice to the president. Last week, 160 of its career government, nonpolitical employees were sent home while the administration reviews staffing in an attempt to align with Trump's priorities.

The employees, commonly referred to as detailees, were summoned for an all-staff call and told they would be expected to be available to the council's senior directors but would not need to report to the White House.

Incoming national security adviser Mike Waltz had signaled before Inauguration Day that he would look to return holdover civil servants who worked in the council during Biden's administration to their home agencies. That was meant to ensure the council is staffed by those who support Trump's goals.

## State Department

A large number of senior career diplomats who served in politically appointed leadership positions — as well as in lower-level posts at the State Department — left their jobs at the demand of the new administration.

It was not immediately clear how many non-political appointees were being asked to leave.

## Foreign aid and development

In his first week in office, Trump issued an executive order directing a 90-day pause on most U.S. foreign assistance disbursed through the State Department. That meant thousands of U.S.-funded humanitarian, development and security programs worldwide stopped work or were preparing to do so; without funds to pay staff, aid organizations were laying off hundreds of employees.

A week into the new administration, at least 56 senior officials in the top U.S. aid and development agency were placed on leave amid an investigation into an alleged effort to thwart Trump's move. Speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal, a current official and a former official at the U.S. Agency for International Development confirmed to The Associated Press the reason given for the move and also said that several hundred contractors based in Washington and elsewhere were laid off.

An internal USAID notice sent late Monday and obtained by AP said new acting administrator Jason Gray had identified "several actions within USAID that appear to be designed to circumvent the President's Executive Orders and the mandate from the American people."

Secretary of State Marco Rubio has specifically exempted only emergency food programs and military aid to Israel and Egypt from the freeze on foreign assistance.

## Diversity, equity and inclusion

On his second day back at the White House, Trump moved to end affirmative action in federal contracting and directed that all federal diversity, equity and inclusion staff be put on paid leave and eventually be laid off.

That move followed an executive order Trump signed on his first day ordering a dismantling of the federal government's diversity and inclusion programs that could touch on everything from anti-bias training to funding for minority farmers and homeowners, programs Trump has called "discrimination."

That action revokes an order issued by President Lyndon Johnson, and curtails DEI programs by federal contractors and grant recipients. It's using one of the key tools utilized by the Biden administration to promote DEI programs across the private sector — pushing their use by federal contractors — to now eradicate them.

While many changes may take months or even years to implement, prominent companies from Walmart to Facebook have already scaled back or ended some of their diversity practices in response to Trump's election and conservative-backed lawsuits against them.

By Friday, federal agencies are expected to develop a plan to execute a "reduction-in-force action" against federal DEI workers in their employ as of Election Day.

## Federal grants and loans

The White House said Tuesday it was pausing federal grants and loans as Trump's administration begins an across-the-board ideological review.

The funding freeze by the Republican administration could affect trillions of dollars and cause widespread

disruption in health care research, education programs and other initiatives. Even grants that have been awarded but not spent are supposed to be halted.

"The use of Federal resources to advance Marxist equity, transgenderism, and green new deal social engineering policies is a waste of taxpayer dollars that does not improve the day-to-day lives of those we serve," said a memo from Matthew Vaeth, the acting director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Democrats and independent organizations swiftly criticized the administration, describing its actions as capricious and illegal because Congress had already authorized the funding.

National Labor Relations Board

A federal agency, the National Labor Relations Board is tasked with preventing unfair labor practices by employers and unions, and protecting the rights of private sector employees. On Tuesday, Trump fired its acting chair, Gwynne Wilcox, the first Black woman to serve as an NLRB member, according to Josh Boxerman, of the National Employment Law Project.

Wilcox's term as a board member was set to run through August 2028. According to national labor law, board members can only be fired for neglect of duty or malfeasance.

In a statement to Bloomberg, which first reported her firing, Wilcox said she believed her removal violates "long-standing Supreme Court precedent" and that she would "be pursuing all legal avenues to challenge" it.

## **DeepSeek says it built its chatbot cheap.**

### **What does that mean for AI's energy needs and the climate?**

By JENNIFER McDERMOTT and MATT O'BRIEN Associated Press

Chinese artificial intelligence startup company DeepSeek stunned markets and AI experts with its claim that it built its immensely popular chatbot at a fraction of the cost of those made by American tech titans.

That immediately called into question the billions of dollars U.S. tech companies are spending on a massive expansion of energy-hungry data centers they say are needed to unlock the next wave of artificial intelligence.

Could this new AI mean the world needs significantly less electricity for the technology than everyone thinks? The answer has profound implications for the overheating climate. AI uses vast amounts of energy, much of which comes from burning fossil fuels, which causes climate change. Tech companies have said their electricity use is going up, when it was supposed to be ramping down, ruining their carefully-laid plans to address climate change.

"There has been a very gung ho, go ahead at all costs mentality in this space, pushing toward investment in fossil fuels," said Eric Gimon, senior fellow at Energy Innovation. "This is an opportunity to tap the brakes."

Making AI more efficient could be less taxing on the environment, experts say, even if its huge electricity needs are not going away.

People flock to new DeepSeek assistant

DeepSeek's claims of building its impressive chatbot on a budget drew curiosity that helped make its AI assistant the No. 1 downloaded free app on Apple's iPhone this week, ahead of U.S.-made chatbots ChatGPT and Google's Gemini.

"All of a sudden we wake up Monday morning and we see a new player number one on the App Store, and all of a sudden it could be a potential gamechanger overnight," said Jay Woods, chief global strategist at Freedom Capital Markets. "It caused a bit of a panic. These were the hottest stocks in the world."

DeepSeek's app competes well with other leading AI models. It can compose software code, solve math problems and address other questions that take multiple steps of planning. It's attracted attention for its ability to explain its reasoning in the process of answering questions.

Leading analysts have been poring through the startup's public research papers about its new model, R1, and its precursors. Among the details that stood out was DeepSeek's assertion that the cost to train the flagship v3 model behind its AI assistant was only \$5.6 million, a stunningly low number compared to the multiple billions of dollars spent to build ChatGPT and other well-known systems. DeepSeek hasn't



responded to requests for comment.

The \$5.6 million number only included actually training the chatbot, not the costs of earlier-stage research and experiments, the paper said. DeepSeek was also working under some constraints: U.S. export controls on the most powerful AI chips. It said it relied on a relatively low-performing AI chip from California chipmaker Nvidia that the U.S. hasn't banned for sale in China.

The energy use of data centers in the United States is projected to double or triple by 2028

Data centers consumed about 4.4% of all U.S. electricity in 2023 and that's expected to increase to 6.7% to 12% of total U.S. electricity by 2028, according to the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

It's been axiomatic that U.S. tech giants must spend much more on building out data centers and other infrastructure to train and run their AI systems. Meta Platforms, the parent of Facebook and Instagram, says it plans to spend up to \$65 billion this year, including on a massive data center complex coming to Louisiana.

Microsoft said it plans to spend \$80 billion this year. And Trump last week joined the CEOs of OpenAI, Oracle and SoftBank to announce a joint venture that hopes to invest up to \$500 billion on data centers and the electricity generation needed for AI development, starting with a project already under construction in Texas.

Experts think that if AI is more efficient, it will be used more, so energy demand will still grow.

When there's an innovative technology that's useful to the general population and it's affordable, people will use it, said Vic Shao, founder of DC Grid, which delivers off-grid, direct current power to data centers and electric vehicle charging stations.

That means data centers will still be built, though they may be able to operate more efficiently, said Travis Miller, an energy and utilities strategist at Morningstar Securities Research.

"We think that the growth in electricity demand will end up at the lower end of most of the ranges out there," he said.

If DeepSeek's claims hold true, some routine AI queries might not need a data center and could be shifted to phones, said Rahul Sandil, vice president and general manager for global marketing and communications at MediaTek, a semiconductor company. That would ease the computing need and give more time to scale up renewable energy sources for data centers.

Bloom Energy is one of the AI-related stocks that took a hit Monday. KR Sridhar, founder and CEO, said it's imperative that the U.S. leads in AI because it can power data centers with clean energy, unlike other countries that still primarily rely on coal.

"We can continue to make it better and we will continue to make it better," he said.

Rick Villars, an analyst for market research group IDC, said the DeepSeek news could influence how AI researchers advance their models, but they'll still need plenty of data centers and electricity.

"We think this actually could boost and accelerate the time frame for when AI becomes much more embedded into our lives, in the work sense, the living sense and in health care," Villars said. "So we still think the capacity is required."

## **Study says climate change made conditions that fed California wildfires more likely, more intense**

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Human-caused climate change increased the likelihood and intensity of the hot, dry and windy conditions that fanned the flames of the recent devastating Southern California wildfires, a scientific study found.

But the myriad of causes that go into the still smoldering fires are complex, so the level of global warming's fingerprints on weeks of burning appears relatively small compared to previous studies of killer heat waves, floods and droughts by the international team at World Weather Attribution. Tuesday's report, too rapid for peer-review yet, found global warming boosted the likelihood of high fire weather conditions in this month's fires by 35% and its intensity by 6%.

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Once-in-a-decade super strong Santa Ana winds, a dry autumn that followed two very wet years that caused rapid growth in flammable chapparal and grass, hot weather, dry air and vulnerable houses in fire-prone areas all were factors in the fast-moving fires that destroyed thousands of homes and killed at least 29 people, study authors said. But the climate attribution team was only able to quantify issues that dealt with the fire weather index, which are the meteorological conditions that add up to fire danger.

The fire weather index — which includes measurements of past rainfall, humidity and wind speed — is where the team looked and found markers of climate change that they could quantify.

The team used observations of past weather and computer simulations that compared what happened this month to a what-if world without the 1.3 degrees Celsius (2.3 degrees Celsius) of human-caused climate change that Earth has had since industrial times. That allowed them to come up with a calculation for warming's contribution to the disaster. It's a method that the National Academy of Sciences says is valid. Even though these rapid studies aren't yet peer-reviewed, nearly all of them are published later in peer-reviewed journals without significant changes, said World Weather Attribution co-lead scientist Friederike Otto.

"The number (35%) doesn't sound like much" because unlike dozens of its past studies, the team looked at a small area and a complex meteorological measurement in the fire weather index that would generally mean there would be large uncertainties, said Otto, a climate scientist at Imperial College London. But in this case the climate change fingerprint is big enough that it stands out, she said.

Those conditions are part of what makes California attractive to 25 million residents, said study co-author John Abatzoglou, a climate and fire scientist at the University of California Merced.

Southern California has "some of the best climate, best weather on the planet — except when you get a combination of conditions that occurred here," Abatzoglou said. "You get the trifecta of dry windy and warm conditions. Those three things, in combination with dry fuels and ignitions, are the perfect recipe for fire disasters."

Abatzoglou said it's like a bunch of switches — dryness, fuels, high temperatures, wind and ignition — that all need to be turned on "for conditions to really take off." Think of it as switches for a light bulb to illuminate — "and so you can think about the artificial warming due to human-caused climate change making the light brighter," added co-author Park Williams, a UCLA fire and climate scientist.

The study also found California's dry season has increased by 23 days and the lack of rain in October, November and December was more than twice as likely now than in pre-industrial times, but because of limitations on the data, researchers couldn't statistically pinpoint these to both climate change and the specific fires this month, Otto said. But she said "the rains are decreasing — that is because of human-induced climate change."

Then add in strong winds to whip and spread flames.

Mike Flannigan, a Canadian fire scientist who wasn't part of the research, said one key to him is the fire season extending longer and "increasing the chance a fire will start during peak Santa Ana winds."

The research couldn't specifically quantify how much, if any, climate change affected the Santa Ana winds.

Craig Clements, a climate scientist and director of wildfire study at San Jose State University, said the rapid study makes sense and fits with past research about other fires.

"It's hard to attribute climate change to every fire event as many do," said Clements, who wasn't part of the research. "If we can state with confidence that the drought is caused by climate change then that is the fingerprint."

If the world warms another 1.3 degrees Celsius from now, the study said people should expect the type of weather conditions that led to these fires to happen another 35% more often.

Otto said this is not an issue of politics, but science.

"It's not something where you can say that this was because California did something very wrong. They did a lot of things right. They did some things that they could do better," Otto said. "But what makes these ever more dangerous, these fires, and what is something that the government of California alone can definitely not do anything about is human-induced climate change. And drill, baby drill will make this much, much worse."

## Andy Reid and Nick Sirianni have this in common: Eagles fans wanted them fired

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

"Fire Andy" chants echoed throughout the stands in Philadelphia during Andy Reid's final season coaching the Eagles in 2012.

Nick Sirianni heard many of those same fans yelling "Fire Nick" in Week 6.

Now, the two head coaches are facing off in the Super Bowl for the second time in three years.

Reid found his greatest success after Eagles owner Jeffrey Lurie fired him following a 4-12 season. It was one of the most amicable separations ever seen in professional sports.

Reid won more games (140) than any coach in franchise history, and led the Eagles to nine playoff appearances, six division titles and five NFC championship games in 14 seasons. But he couldn't win the big one — Philadelphia lost to New England in the team's lone Super Bowl appearance under Reid — and fans starving for a championship had run out of patience.

Lurie gave Reid a game ball and the coach affectionately known as "Big Red" received a standing ovation from employees on his way out of the team facility on Dec. 31, 2012.

"I have a hard time standing before people without a few boos involved. But I'm taking it, I'm taking it all in," Reid told them. "These have been the greatest 14 years of my life."

He added: "Sometimes change is good. ... I know the next guy that comes in will be phenomenal. The ultimate goal is a Super Bowl. Everybody in this room, I wish you a big ring on the finger in the near future. "Hail to the Eagles, baby."

Reid quickly landed in Kansas City after Chiefs owner Clark Hunt and several team executives went to Philadelphia and spoke with him for nine hours at the airport. Reid was supposed to board a plane for Arizona to interview with the Cardinals. That never happened.

Instead, he built a dynasty in Kansas City anchored by Patrick Mahomes. They're on the verge of history, one win away from becoming the first team to three-peat in the Super Bowl era. They've already won three rings together in four Super Bowl appearances over the previous five years.

"You think back to 2013, when Andy joined the organization, made us an immediate winner and really changed the culture here, and then a few years later, he got the quarterback that he had been waiting his whole career for," Hunt said. "I think there was a comment earlier about why it's so hard, why nobody has ever gone back to have a chance at a three-peat, I think it's because those teams didn't have the combination of Andy Reid and Patrick Mahomes."

The Eagles hired Chip Kelly to replace Reid. He lasted three seasons. Then they turned to Doug Pederson, who brought the city its first Super Bowl title in just his second season. Pederson was gone three years later.

Sirianni came in as an unpopular hire just like Reid and Pederson were in Philly.

But here's Sirianni again seeking his first championship, just a few months after he was vilified nationally for reacting emotionally and yelling and gesturing at the fans who screamed "Fire Nick" during a victory against the Cleveland Browns.

ESPN analyst Damien Woody, a two-time Super Bowl champion with the Patriots, called Sirianni a "clown" on national television. Other former players-turned-talking heads ridiculed Sirianni and questioned his ability to lead the team.

But all Sirianni does is win.

His .706 winning percentage (48-20) is the fifth highest in NFL history. He's guided the Eagles to the playoffs in each of his four seasons and nearly beat the Chiefs in the Super Bowl two years ago when Mahomes rallied Kansas City to a 38-35 victory.

Players rallied around Sirianni after the fan controversy in October and that win against Cleveland was the first of 10 in a row. The Eagles tied a franchise record with 14 wins and got three more in the playoffs, scoring a record 55 points against Washington in the NFC title game.

"This game is about overcoming adversity," Sirianni said. "There are going to be good plays in the game

and there are going to be bad plays in the game. There will be good moments in a season and bad moments in a season.

"It's about overcoming and embracing the adversity because really what we've talked about as a team is like adversity, we've all had to have adversity to be in this moment where we are right now, so adversity is what makes you who you are. It's been the story of the 2023 to the 2024 Eagles. As bad of a feeling we had about how last year ended, I think it makes you who you are. These guys are hungry, and we've got one more to go."

Win or lose, Reid's legacy is set. He has a Hall of Fame resume.

For Sirianni, a victory could silence critics once and for all.

## Michigan Democratic Sen. Gary Peters will not run for reelection, opening a key Senate seat in 2026

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI and ISABELLA VOLMERT Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Michigan Sen. Gary Peters, who led the Democrats' Senate campaign efforts the past two election cycles, has announced he will not seek a third term in 2026, creating a highly contested battleground seat expected to be coveted by both major political parties.

The 66-year-old's unexpected decision Tuesday to step aside after just two terms comes as a surprise and poses a challenge for Democrats in Michigan during a turbulent period, likely dividing their strong bench between the gubernatorial and Senate races in 2026.

"After three terms in the House and two terms in the Senate, I believe now is time for me to write a few more paragraphs in my current chapter and then turn over the reins," Peters said in a YouTube video. "I will therefore not seek reelection in 2026."

Having lost Michigan in the presidential race, Peters' decision forces Democrats to defend a critical Senate seat in Michigan without the advantage of an incumbent, complicating their efforts to regain control of the chamber, where Republicans hold a 53-47 majority. Expected to be among the names most circulated for the position is Pete Buttigieg, the former U.S. transportation secretary, who moved to Michigan in recent years.

This is the second consecutive cycle in which Democrats must navigate the challenge of defending an open Senate seat in Michigan, a state won by Republican Donald Trump in the 2024 presidential contest.

Longtime Sen. Debbie Stabenow shocked many observers by announcing she would not seek a fifth term in 2024. Democratic Sen. Elissa Slotkin held that seat for the party by a narrow margin.

First elected to the Senate in 2014 after serving three terms in the U.S. House, Peters has earned a reputation as a mild-mannered and moderate politician. Besides leading the Senate Democrats' campaign efforts from 2021 until earlier this year, he also chaired the Senate Homeland Security Committee from 2021 to 2025 and is currently the ranking member on the committee.

Peters earned praise from many Democrats for aiding the party's strong performance in the 2022 midterms by winning a number of hotly contested races to hold control of the Senate. But two years later, Republicans flipped several highly competitive seats, costing Democrats their majority in the upper chamber.

Peters' decision sets up a major midterm election in the state. Second-term Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer is term-limited, and the field for her successor is already taking shape.

Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan announced after the 2024 election that he is running for governor as an independent. Democratic Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson and Republican leader of the state Senate Aric Nesbitt have launched campaigns as well.

Buttigieg, who has been weighing a run for governor, is also considering running for the Senate in Michigan. Buttigieg, a former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, moved to Michigan shortly after his unsuccessful campaign for president in 2020.

The news of the open Senate seat quickly drew interest from many public officials eyeing higher office. State Sen. Mallory McMorrow, a Democrat whose profile has risen thanks to a viral floor speech she gave in 2022, confirmed in a statement that she's looking into running for Senate as well as governor.



Second-term Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist II, also a Democrat, is another potential candidate for both the Senate seat and governor's office.

Democratic Rep. Haley Stevens is considering running for the open Senate seat in Michigan, according to a person familiar with the matter, granted anonymity to discuss plans not yet made public. Stevens, who represents the Detroit suburb of Oakland County, was first elected to Congress in 2018.

Republican Rep. John James said "Brighter days are ahead for Michigan!" in a post to X, formerly Twitter, hours after the news of Peters' announcement. James ran unsuccessfully for Senate twice, against Peters in 2020 and Stabenow in 2018. He found success in the House in 2022 and secured his reelection in 2024 after a second competitive campaign for the district in the suburban area of Detroit.

Whitmer, a potential 2028 presidential candidate, said she is not interested in pursuing the open Senate seat while speaking on ABC's "The View" on Tuesday.

"I've got two more years on my term. I've got a lot of things I want to get done as governor," she said. "What comes after that, I don't know yet."

The Detroit News first reported Peters' decision.

## Serbia's prime minister resigns as anti-corruption protests sparked by deadly collapse swell

By JOVANA GEC Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — Serbia's populist prime minister, Milos Vucevic, resigned Tuesday in an attempt to calm political tensions stoked by weeks of massive anti-corruption protests that started after the deadly collapse of a concrete overhang at a recently renovated train station.

The November collapse at the central station in Novi Sad, one of Serbia's largest cities, killed 15 people and happened months after it reopened, fueling accusations that the construction was unsafe. The tragedy has become a flashpoint for broader dissatisfaction with Serbia's authoritarian rule and has led to growing public demands for transparency in the graft-plagued country that has carried out a quick series of large infrastructure projects, mostly with Chinese companies.

"It is my appeal for everyone to calm down the passions and return to dialogue," Vucevic said at a news conference announcing his resignation, which was followed hours later by Novi Sad's mayor stepping down.

The protests, including one Tuesday evening in Novi Sad that drew thousands of people, have spread to streets and university campuses throughout the country of roughly 6.6 million people, as citizens from all walks of life, including actors, farmers, lawyers and judges, have thrown their support behind the student movement that has rattled the country's most powerful figure, President Aleksandar Vucic.

The prime minister's resignation could lead to an early parliamentary election or to the ruling majority, led by the right-wing Serbian Progressive Party founded by Vucic and led by Vucevic, trying to form a new government.

Vucic said at a news conference hours after Vucevic resigned that the decision will be made within the next 10 days. He rejected an opposition request for a transitional government and warned that Serbia's stability has been shaken.

"Order will be restored in Serbia, peace and stability will be preserved," said Vucic. He issued a veiled threat, saying that "rage is mounting every day on the other side — the side of the majority."

Opposition parties said they'd insist on a transitional government that would create conditions for a free and fair election. The governing populists have faced accusations of irregularities during past elections.

Vucevic became the prime minister in April 2024 after his party won an election marred by tensions and captured more than five times as many seats as any other party.

"They have been in a free fall since the Novi Sad tragedy," journalist Slobodan Georgiev said of the ruling party on N1 television, adding that Vucic was seeking a "buffer" with the prime minister's resignation.

Protests are the biggest challenge yet to the ruling populists

Vucic, who was first elected president in 2017 and counts Hungary's populist conservative prime minister,

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Viktor Orbán, as an ally, has managed to stifle past anti-government protests. But the protests since the train station collapse have extended beyond idealistic university students and faculties.

The students' call for justice has resonated in a country where corruption is widespread and few feel that state institutions are serving the public's interests.

Branimir Jovancicevic, a professor at the Faculty of Chemistry in Belgrade, expressed hope that Vucevic's resignation is a first step toward further political changes in Serbia, where power is concentrated in the hands of the president.

"If the president thinks that by replacing one, essentially, unimportant figure ... will solve the problem ... he is deeply mistaken," Jovancicevic said. "This must lead to total political changes because autocracy and dictatorship in Serbia, in the heart of Europe, must be stopped."

On Monday, tens of thousands of people joined students in a 24-hour blockade of a key traffic intersection in the Serbian capital, Belgrade.

In an attempt to defuse tensions on Monday, Vucic, Vucevic and the parliament's speaker, Ana Brnabic called for talks with the students. But student protest leaders have so far rebuffed such invitations, noting that Vucic's role as president is officially a largely ceremonial one. Instead, they have called for governmental institutions, including the police and judiciary, to do their jobs and enforce the rule of law spelled out by the constitution.

#### Another student is assaulted

Vucevic said the immediate cause for his quitting was an attack on a female student in Novi Sad early Tuesday by assailants allegedly from the Serbian Progressive Party. He said that "whenever it seems there is hope to return to social dialogue, to talk ... it's like an invisible hand creates a new incident and tensions mount again."

Echoing statements Vucic has made, the outgoing prime minister also said the protests "undoubtedly" have been organized from abroad "with an aim to directly jeopardize Serbia as a state," though he offered no evidence.

"I can never justify or understand many of these protests, blockades of lives, of roads and the freedom of movement of other citizens," Vucevic said.

Students in Novi Sad said they were horrified by the latest assault, which they said was carried out by thugs with baseball bats who attacked two groups of students and chased them in their car. Prosecutors said four people had been detained in the attack.

"We are horrified over the state of our society where such a situation is possible. We have had enough of blood," the students said in an Instagram post.

During the big rally in Novi Sad later Tuesday, where many demonstrators waved their red-painted hands or placards featuring red handprints — a symbol of the movement meant to tell authorities they have blood on their hands — a student told the crowd that "this is not just our struggle, it's the struggle of all (people) who want justice. The attacks on students must not be repeated."

Several incidents have marred the street demonstrations in recent weeks, including drivers twice ramming into crowds and injuring two women.

Students and others have been holding daily 15-minute traffic blockades throughout Serbia at 11:52 a.m., which was the time the overhang fell on Nov. 1. The blockades honor the 15 people who were killed, including two children.

#### Doubts over prosecutions

Serbia's prosecutors have filed charges tied to the train station collapse against 13 people, including a government minister and several state officials. But former Construction Minister Goran Vesic, who had resigned shortly after the tragedy, has been released from detention, fueling doubts over the investigation's independence.

The main railway station in Novi Sad was renovated and inaugurated twice in recent years as part of a wider infrastructure deal with Chinese state companies and a fast railway link with neighboring Hungary.

## Six active duty service members file first lawsuit challenging Trump's transgender troop ban

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Six transgender active duty service members and two former service members who seek re-enlistment on Tuesday filed the first lawsuit challenging President Donald Trump's executive order that calls for revising policy on transgender troops and probably sets the stage for banning them in the armed forces.

Trump's order, signed Monday, claims the sexual identity of transgender service members "conflicts with a soldier's commitment to an honorable, truthful, and disciplined lifestyle" and is harmful to military readiness. It requires Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to issue a revised policy.

Army Capt. Gordon Herrero, one of the six active duty plaintiffs, said in a statement accompanying the lawsuit: "There's nothing about being transgender that makes me better or worse than any other soldier I serve alongside. We are all here because we are committed to our country, and we are passionate, willing, and able to serve effectively."

The six plaintiffs include a Sailor of the Year honoree, a Bronze Star recipient and several who were awarded meritorious service medals.

"I've spent more than half my life in the Army, including combat in Afghanistan," said Army Sgt. 1st Class Kate Cole. "Removing qualified transgender soldiers like me means an exodus of experienced personnel."

The lawsuit is being filed by the same legal team that spent years during Trump's first administration fighting the Republican's ban on transgender troops, which the Supreme Court allowed to take effect even as the legal fight against it continued in the courts. Joe Biden scrapped the ban when he took office.

The lawsuit challenges the executive order on the basis of equal protection and argues that it reveals animus against a specific group.

"The law is very clear that the government can't base policies on disapproval of particular groups of people," said Shannon Minter, legal director for the National Center for Lesbian Rights. "That's animus. And animus-based laws are presumed to be invalid and unconstitutional."

NCLR and GLAD Law filed the challenge to the executive order in the U.S. District Court of the District of Columbia.

Sasha Buchert, counsel for Lambda Legal, said her group, along with the Human Rights Campaign, also plans to file a legal challenge.

The Pentagon said it does not comment on pending or ongoing litigation but "will fully execute and implement all directives outlined in the Executive Orders issued by the President, ensuring that they are carried out with utmost professionalism, efficiency, and in alignment with national security objectives."

There is no official data on the number of transgender personnel in the military, but the number is probably in the thousands, Minter said. Unlike Trump's initial ban in 2017, the new executive order not only bans all transgender people from serving in the future but also would target those currently serving, Minter said.

## Some Trump voters are skeptical of his opening moves to embrace fellow billionaires

By JONATHAN J. COOPER, BILL BARROW and AMELIA THOMSON DeVEAUX Associated Press

MESA, Ariz. (AP) — Enrique Lopez votes sporadically but bought into Donald Trump's vows to fight for everyday workers, helping the Republican flip Arizona last year. Then the home construction contractor watched how the billionaire president opened his second administration.

"So, the rich control the poor, I guess. They do whatever they want. They get away with it," Lopez said after seeing Elon Musk, the world's richest man, and other tech moguls, notably Meta's Mark Zuckerberg and Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, at Trump's limited-seating, indoor inauguration.

The 56-year-old Lopez, a resident of the Phoenix exurb of Apache Junction, said he was also struck by the president's lack of emphasis on housing costs or consumer interests: "I didn't hear anything about

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helping people out.”

Trump insists his overall agenda will help working- and middle-class Americans — notably his executive orders intended to goose domestic energy production and, he reasons, lower consumer costs. Days into his return to power, however, reactions from some voters highlight how difficult it could be for Trump to maintain his populist appeal alongside his embrace of fellow billionaires as well as tariffs and other policies that could stoke the very inflation he criticized as a candidate.

According to AP VoteCast, voters whose total household income in 2023 was under \$50,000 were split between Trump and Democratic nominee Kamala Harris, while Trump won more than half of voters whose total household income was between \$50,000 and \$99,999 and Harris won among voters whose household income was \$100,000 or more. The median annual household income in the U.S. is about \$81,000. More than half of voters without a college degree supported Trump in the 2024 election, while a similar share of voters with a college degree supported Harris.

The Associated Press spoke to a dozen voters in Arizona about Trump’s inauguration and his first days in office. Some middle-class Trump voters say that much of what he has done reflects his campaign — especially his immigration crackdown and the targeting of LGBTQ-friendly policies.

“I’m happy about that,” said Lorrinda Parker, a 65-year-old retired local government worker in Arizona, who said she distrusts both major political parties and voted for Trump because she is concerned about medical treatments for trans children, the economy and what she described as a “definitely dangerous” U.S.-Mexico border.

Yet Parker expressed concerns about the company Trump keeps. The political class, she said, is a “little insular world” where power brokers are “not paying attention to the people.”

Billionaires, she said, could provide valuable input as presidential advisers. But she likened the inauguration trio to a “technocracy,” saying they represent “elitist thinking, ‘We know more because we’re so smart,’” and adding her wish that Trump keep “a tight leash” on them.

The White House did not immediately respond Tuesday to a request for comment.

U.S. adults broadly think it is a bad thing if the president relies on billionaires for advice about government policy, according to a January AP-NORC poll. About 6 in 10 U.S. adults say this would be a “very” or “somewhat” bad thing, while only about 1 in 10 call it a very or somewhat good thing, and about 3 in 10 are neutral.

The poll found warning flags specifically for Musk, whom Trump has empowered as chairman of the advisory Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE. According to the poll, about one-third of Americans have a favorable view of Musk. That is down slightly from December. Support for the special commission he’s helming is similarly low: Only about 3 in 10 U.S. adults strongly or somewhat approve of Trump’s creation of DOGE. About 4 in 10 disapprove, while the rest were neutral or didn’t know enough to say. (The poll was conducted before Vivek Ramaswamy announced he would no longer be involved in the group.)

Democrats and labor-friendly activists, meanwhile, are pointing to Trump’s embrace of fellow billionaires at his inauguration as they look for a message to galvanize opposition to the president.

“You can bring those Gilded Age analogies straight to the fore,” said Maurice Mitchell, who leads the progressive Working Families Party. “That image tells the story better than a thousand breathless op-eds. ... Once he got the votes and won the election, he’s pivoted in a naked and clear way.”

Mitchell compared the scene with Musk, Zuckerberg and Bezos with Trump backing off since Election Day on pledges to slash consumer prices immediately and refusing to promise that his tariffs won’t feed inflation. The president over the weekend reiterated he would push to end income taxes on tips, a key campaign pledge that some Democrats embraced last year. Still, Trump also is determined to extend 2017 tax cuts tilted to corporations and the wealthiest U.S. households, Mitchell noted.

“There can’t be any doubt that Trump 2.0 is a government by, for and with billionaires,” he said.

Mary Small, who leads the strategy and organizing efforts for the progressive group Indivisible, suggested Musk seemed “like he was calling the shots” even before the inauguration by pushing House Republicans to spike a December budget deal with then-President Joe Biden. And she noted that Trump seems already to have sided with Musk over rank-in-file “MAGA supporters” with his support for H-1B visas for highly



skilled immigrants.

"Musk says the quiet part out loud," Mitchell said.

But, he added, working-class voters and advocates who are frustrated cannot simply rely on Trump's or other billionaires' missteps.

"In some ways, Trump's and MAGA's hubris is an advantage," he said. "We still need to fill in the other gaps and explain the positive direction we want to take the country."

## Amazon's advocates fear Trump's return means little US help to protect rainforest

By STEVEN GRATTAN Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — Alexis Damancio Silva can't forget the hardship in his town of Puerto Narino in far southern Colombia last year when extreme drought nearly dried up the Amazon River. Pink dolphins and fish died. Crops dried up. The town lost its easy access to markets.

Silva is hopeful the U.S. would help fund projects that could make Indigenous communities like his more resilient — solar panels for energy to refrigerate fish, for example, or cisterns to catch precious rain water.

"We ask the government of President Trump ... to send us resources," to help the region's Indigenous people, he said in a Zoom interview with The Associated Press. Little comes from the state, he said.

Environmental groups say that's unlikely to happen, and that was even before Trump froze new funding for almost all U.S. foreign assistance.

They fear Donald Trump's second administration will bring nothing good for the Amazon rainforest. Besides Trump's Day 1 move to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement, they fear he'll cut U.S. funding for policing that has targeted illegal logging, mining and other things that have damaged the rainforest. They also worry he will back right-wing politicians who favor aggressive development in the Amazon, which is critical for storing carbon dioxide that would otherwise warm the planet.

"The implications of the Trump administration for the Amazon rainforest range from very concerning to horrifying," said Andrew Miller, advocacy director of nonprofit Amazon Watch.

Trump's first week back in office was loaded with executive orders that prioritized fossil fuels, including declaring an energy emergency in the U.S. and his intent to sweep aside barriers to developing oil and gas. They've also been wrapped in an "America First" message that doesn't fit with expansive foreign aid.

On Sunday, he swiftly faced down Colombia President Gustavo Petro on Sunday by threatening steep tariffs after Petro refused to allow military planes carrying deported migrants to land in Colombia. Trump's plans to play hardball in the region were evident weeks ago when he suggested he could use military force to take control of the Panama Canal.

Miller said his organization had advised its partners "to assume the Trump administration priorities will not include climate, environmental or Indigenous rights programs."

In Trump's first term, U.S. Agency for International Development's budget ranged from about \$17 billion to \$27 billion annually, with significant proposed cuts that were often moderated by Congress. Under President Joe Biden, USAID's budget rose to \$30.5 billion in 2024, with a focus on global health, climate action, humanitarian aid, and promoting democracy. The new administration said the aid freeze would be in place for 90 days as it considers which programs to keep.

In Brazil, home to around 60% of the Amazon, organized crime like logging and drug trafficking thrived under the far-right presidency of Jair Bolsonaro, with severe environmental consequences. President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva made the protection of the Amazon a central priority when he took office in 2023.

Brazil's environment minister, Marina Silva, told the AP that Trump's return poses a significant test for U.S. democracy and international institutions, and that as the world's second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases, it is "crucial" the U.S. fulfills its responsibilities.

She sees some hope, saying the world has much stronger climate governance nowadays in the face of the climate crisis.

"This doesn't mean we'll have an easy time with Trump in office, quite the opposite," Marina Silva said.

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"We just have to acknowledge that we're already seeing some companies and leaders ... abandoning or loosening commitments made previously."

Since Trump's election, several major U.S. banks have withdrawn from a network aimed at lending practices that square with a global commitment to reduced emissions.

Silva said it's important for countries to keep "reaffirming the size of the climate challenges" and showing how to overcome them. "Reality needs to take precedence over President Trump's well-known denialist rhetoric," she said.

The Trump administration did not respond to messages seeking comment.

Support for pro-development politicians?

Development in the Amazon is a polarizing issue in Brazil. Lawmakers who support it focus on economic growth, job creation, and infrastructure. More liberal lawmakers, environmentalists and Indigenous rights groups oppose it over damage to the environment and impacts on people who live in the forest.

Lula has had some success in clamping down on illegal logging, mining, drug trafficking, and conversion of land for agriculture. That came with support from Biden, who in November became the first U.S. president to visit the Amazon and pledged \$50 million to the Amazon Fund, which raises money to protect the Amazon rainforest. Much of that money went toward increased policing in the region.

Carlos Nobre, a Brazilian climate scientist and leading researcher studying the Amazon rainforest, said he didn't see Trump continuing that commitment. He also said he is concerned about Trump's past support for Bolsonaro, and expected him to again boost right-wing politicians.

Though Bolsonaro is prohibited from running for office until 2030, his son Eduardo is a potential presidential candidate next year and Brazil's National Congress has plenty of members who favor Amazonian development.

Jair Bolsonaro, who has supported Trump's false claims of a stolen 2020 election, tried to attend his inauguration but wasn't allowed to leave Brazil to attend. Eduardo Bolsonaro did attend.

Miller expected Trump to tilt toward "extreme right-wing candidates" who offer him praise, boosting them in elections.

"Their policies, should they be elected, will spell disaster for the Amazon rainforest in the foreseeable future," Miller said. "Trump 2.0 will offer Amazonian governments a permission structure to ignore or walk back climate commitments, precisely at the moment when protection of the rainforest demands greater ambition and regional coordination."

Miller is most concerned about U.S. support for multilateral human rights mechanisms like the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

"Both are important for the protection of threatened Amazon community leaders and environmental defenders," he said.

Funding cuts and multinational cooperation

John Walsh, director for drug policy and the Andes at the Washington Office on Latin America, said funding cuts are his major concern after policy.

"We can expect steep cuts if not entire elimination of U.S. foreign aid that was directed towards climate mitigation and adaptation globally," Walsh said. "That's matched by the incoming administration's focus on how to cut the federal budget in ways that will fall almost entirely on discretionary programs that don't have solid constituencies domestically."

Trump was generally skeptical of multinational cooperation in his first term, preferring a more unilateral approach to foreign policy with his administration often prioritizing U.S. interests over international agreements or collaborations.

"For an issue like climate change, that is a collective action problem ... and for the world's largest economy and historically the largest emitter of carbon dioxide to absent itself from that ... is significant," Walsh said.

## US consumer confidence dips again to start the year, according to business group

By MATT OTT AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. consumer confidence dipped for the second consecutive month in January, a business research group said Tuesday.

The Conference Board reported that its consumer confidence index retreated this month to 104.1, from 109.5 in December. That is worse than the economist projections for a reading of 105.8.

December's reading was revised up by 4.8 points but still represented a decline from November.

The consumer confidence index measures both Americans' assessment of current economic conditions and their outlook for the next six months.

Consumers appeared increasingly confident heading into the end of 2024 and spending during the holiday season was resolute. In the face of higher borrowing costs, retail sales rose 0.4% in December and stores generally reported healthy sales during the winter holiday shopping season.

The board said that consumers' view of current conditions tumbled 9.7 points to a reading of 134.3 in January and views on current labor market conditions fell for the first time since September.

The measure of Americans' short-term expectations for income, business and the job market fell 2.6 points to 83.9. The Conference Board says a reading under 80 can signal a potential recession in the near future.

However, the proportion of consumers expecting a recession over the next 12 months remained stable at the low end of the series range.

Though the board's index has declined the past two months, consumers continue to spend, helping to prop up the U.S. economy since the sharp rebound from the COVID-19 recession in the spring of 2020.

In December, the government said that the U.S. economy grew at a healthy 3.1% annual clip from July through September, propelled by vigorous consumer spending and an uptick in exports. GDP growth has topped 2% in eight of the last nine quarters.

All of that spending could be catching up to consumers. The Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia reported last week that credit card balances and delinquencies are on the rise and that active cardholders making the minimum payment is at a 12-year high.

The share of respondents to the Conference Board's latest survey who said they plan to purchase "big-ticket" items in the next six months was down slightly from its December report.

Consumer spending accounts for about two-thirds of U.S. economic activity and is closely watched by economists for signs how the American consumer is feeling.

## DeepSeek's new AI chatbot and ChatGPT answer sensitive questions about China differently

By KANIS LEUNG Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Chinese tech startup DeepSeek's new artificial intelligence chatbot has sparked discussions about the competition between China and the U.S. in AI development, with many users flocking to test the rival of OpenAI's ChatGPT.

DeepSeek's AI assistant was the No. 1 downloaded free app on Apple's iPhone store on Tuesday afternoon and its launch made Wall Street tech superstars' stocks tumble. Observers are eager to see whether the Chinese company has matched America's leading AI companies at a fraction of the cost.

The chatbot's ultimate impact on the AI industry is still unclear, but it appears to censor answers on sensitive Chinese topics, a practice commonly seen on China's internet. In 2023, China issued regulations requiring companies to conduct a security review and obtain approvals before their products can be publicly launched.

Here are some answers The Associated Press received from DeepSeek's new chatbot and ChatGPT:

What does Winnie the Pooh mean in China?

For many Chinese, the Winnie the Pooh character is a playful taunt of President Xi Jinping. Chinese censors in the past briefly banned social media searches for the bear in mainland China.

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ChatGPT got that idea right. It said Winnie the Pooh had become a symbol of political satire and resistance, often used to mock or criticize Xi. It explained that internet users compared Xi to the bear because of perceived similarities in their physical appearance.

DeepSeek's chatbot said the bear is a beloved cartoon character that is adored by countless children and families in China, symbolizing joy and friendship.

Then, abruptly, it said the Chinese government is "dedicated to providing a wholesome cyberspace for its citizens." It added that all online content is managed under Chinese laws and socialist core values, with the aim of protecting national security and social stability.

Who is the current US president?

It might be easy for many people to answer, but both AI chatbots mistakenly said Joe Biden, whose term ended last week, because they said their data was last updated in October 2023. But they both tried to be responsible by reminding users to verify with updated sources.

What happened during the military crackdown in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in June 1989?

The 1989 crackdown saw government troops open fire on student-led pro-democracy protesters in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, resulting in hundreds, if not thousands, of deaths. The event remains a taboo subject in mainland China.

DeepSeek's chatbot answered, "Sorry, that's beyond my current scope. Let's talk about something else."

But ChatGPT gave a detailed answer on what it called "one of the most significant and tragic events" in modern Chinese history. The chatbot talked about the background of the massive protests, the estimated casualties and their legacy.

What is the state of US-China relations?

DeepSeek's chatbot's answer echoed China's official statements, saying the relationship between the world's two largest economies is one of the most important bilateral relationships globally. It said China is committed to developing ties with the U.S. based on mutual respect and win-win cooperation.

"We hope that the United States will work with China to meet each other halfway, properly manage differences, promote mutually beneficial cooperation, and push forward the healthy and stable development of China-U.S. relations," it said.

Some of these phrases — "meet ... halfway," "mutual respect" and "win-win cooperation" — mirror language used by a Chinese Foreign Ministry official in a 2021 news conference.

ChatGPT's answer was more nuanced. It said the state of the U.S.-China relationship is complex, characterized by a mix of economic interdependence, geopolitical rivalry and collaboration on global issues. It highlighted key topics including the two countries' tensions over the South China Sea and Taiwan, their technological competition and more.

"The relationship between the U.S. and China remains tense but crucial," part of its answer said.

Is Taiwan part of China?

Again — like the Chinese official narrative — DeepSeek's chatbot said Taiwan has been an integral part of China since ancient times. An example of a very similar statement is found in this government document issued in 2022.

"Compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are connected by blood, jointly committed to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," the chatbot said.

ChatGPT said the answer depends on one's perspective, while laying out China and Taiwan's positions and the views of the international community. It said from a legal and political standpoint, China claims Taiwan is part of its territory and the island democracy operates as a "de facto independent country" with its own government, economy and military.



## Indiana man pardoned by Trump is fatally shot during a traffic stop

RENSSELAER, Ind. (AP) — An Indiana man was fatally shot by a deputy during a traffic stop just days after he was pardoned by President Donald Trump for a misdemeanor related to the 2021 U.S. Capitol riot.

Matthew Huttle, 42, of Hobart was killed Sunday by a Jasper County sheriff's deputy, authorities said. State police are investigating. They said the deputy tried to arrest Huttle when "an altercation took place between the suspect and the officer, which resulted in the officer firing his weapon and fatally wounding the suspect.

"The investigation also shows that during the traffic stop, the suspect was in possession of a firearm," state police added.

No other details were released. Authorities didn't say what might have prompted the traffic stop.

"Our condolences go out to the family of the deceased as any loss of life is traumatic to those that were close to Mr. Huttle," Sheriff Patrick Williamson said.

Nick Barnes, an attorney who was representing Huttle in pending motor vehicle cases in Lake County, said he didn't know the circumstances of the shooting.

"I plan to find out a lot more about it," Barnes said.

In 2023, Huttle was sentenced to six months in custody after pleading guilty to entering a restricted building, the U.S. Capitol. He had traveled with his uncle to Washington to attend the Jan. 6, 2021, pro-Trump rally. Huttle was inside the Capitol for 16 minutes and recorded it on video.

"He is not a true believer in any political cause," defense attorney Andrew Hemmer said in a court filing. "He instead went to the rally because he thought it would be a historic moment and he had nothing better to do after getting out of jail" for a driving offense.

## Trump fills his government with billionaires after running on a working-class message

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — President Donald Trump's brash populism has always involved incongruence: the billionaire businessman-politician stirring the passions of millions who, regardless of the U.S. economy's trajectory, could never afford to live in his Manhattan skyscraper or visit his club in south Florida.

His second White House is looking a lot like the inside of Mar-a-Lago, with extremely wealthy Americans taking key roles in his Republican administration.

The world's richest man, Elon Musk, is overseeing a new Department of Government Efficiency. Billionaires or mega-millionaires are lined up to run the treasury, commerce, interior and education departments, NASA and the Small Business Administration, and fill key foreign posts.

"He's bringing in folks who have had great success in the private sector," said Debbie Dooley, an early 2015 Trump supporter and onetime national organizer in the anti-establishment Tea Party movement. "If you need to have brain surgery, you want the proven brain surgeons."

Others raise concerns about conflicts of interest at odds with Trump's pledge to fight for "forgotten men and women" in a country where the median household net worth is about \$193,000 and median annual household income is about \$81,000.

"It's hard to conceive how the wealthiest set of Cabinet nominees and White House appointments in history will understand what average working people are going through," said former Labor Secretary Robert Reich, who served under President Bill Clinton and has warned for decades about the nation's widening wealth and wage gaps.

Countered Dooley: "Trump sets the agenda. If they won't enact his policies, then they will hear him say what we hear on 'The Apprentice' all the time: 'You're fired!'"

Here is a closer look at some of Trump's picks, their net worth according to Forbes, and what the choices could mean:

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Elon Musk

Musk (net worth estimated above \$400 billion) is chairing the new Department of Government Efficiency, which is a special commission charged with slashing federal spending. The extensive ties his businesses have to the government have raised questions about Musk's potential conflicts in the role.

Linda McMahon

McMahon was picked to be Trump's secretary of education. She is the wife of Vince McMahon, who is worth at least \$3 billion.

The former WWE wrestling executive will lead an agency that many conservatives have called for abolishing altogether. While that's a heavy lift politically, McMahon and Trump have endorsed an expansion of "school choice," programs that steer taxpayer money to private school tuition. She also could be in charge of implementing Trump's proposals to withhold federal money from public schools — K-12 and higher education — that do not meet White House demands to modify or scrap diversity programs.

Doug Burgum

The North Dakota governor (estimated net worth \$1.1 billion) made his money as a software entrepreneur. Burgum impressed Trump during his own failed bid for the GOP's 2024 presidential nomination. As interior secretary, Burgum would be charged with implementing Trump's "Drill, baby, drill" promise — making it even easier for energy companies to tap fossil fuel resources, including from public lands.

Scott Bessent

Forbes has not yet identified Bessent as a billionaire, but the veteran hedge fund manager confirmed Monday as treasury secretary certainly is worth many hundreds of millions. At Treasury, he will play key roles in selling and implementing a number of Trump's signature policies: reinstating the 2017 tax cuts tilted to corporations and wealthy individuals, imposing tariffs on many imports and cutting taxes on overtime wages, Social Security benefits and tip income.

Reich, the former labor secretary, noted that Bessent and his fellow wealthy Cabinet designees stand to benefit personally from Trump's tax ideas. Trump tax policies, which helped widen the deficit in Trump's first term, are juxtaposed with Bessent's warnings about the dangers of rising U.S. debt and the cost of annual interest payments to the government's bond holders.

Howard Lutnick

An apparent runner-up to head Treasury, Lutnick (estimated net worth \$1.5 billion) has been nominated to be secretary of commerce. Lutnick, who made his fortune as a financial services executive, is still slated for a high-profile post that will put him at the center of Trump's promised trade wars with China and other nations, including Mexico and Canada. Commerce also oversees several agencies, including the Census Bureau, whose calculations are key to determining the funding distributions of programs across the federal government.

Kelly Loeffler

The Georgia businesswoman named to lead the Small Business Administration was the wealthiest member of the Senate during her brief stay on Capitol Hill. Loeffler is married to Jeffrey Sprecher, CEO of Intercontinental Exchange, the publicly traded firm that owns the New York Stock Exchange. That's not the center of commerce for the SBA's usual clientele. The agency was founded in 1953 and describes itself as "the only cabinet-level federal agency fully dedicated to small business" by providing "counseling, capital, and contracting expertise as the nation's only go-to resource and voice for small businesses."

As a senator, Loeffler faced ethics complaints over alleged insider trading tied to stock trades she and her husband made as members of Congress first started receiving briefings related to the coronavirus pandemic. The trades occurred weeks before the pandemic caused markets to plummet. Justice Department and Senate inquiries later found no wrongdoing on Loeffler's part.

Jared Isaacman

Isaacman, another financial services billionaire, was the first wealthy individual to take a space walk through Musk's company, SpaceX. This choice, as much as any, illustrates Trump's lean to the wealthy private sector, given that billionaires like Musk and Amazon chief Jeff Bezos are now competing in a space sector that was once the province of the federal government and the agency that Isaacman would lead as NASA administrator.

## Egg prices are soaring. Don't expect that to change anytime soon

By JOSH FUNK, MARK VANCLEAVE and DEE-ANN DURBIN Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Bird flu is forcing farmers to slaughter millions of chickens a month, pushing U.S. egg prices to more than double their cost in the summer of 2023. And it appears there may be no relief in sight, given the surge in demand as Easter approaches.

The average price per dozen nationwide hit \$4.15 in December. That's not quite as high as the \$4.82 record set two years ago, but the Agriculture Department predicts prices are going to soar another 20% this year.

Shoppers in some parts of the country are already paying more than double the average price, or worse, finding empty shelves in their local grocery stores. Organic and cage-free varieties are even more expensive.

Some grocery stores have even limited how many eggs shoppers can buy.

"It's just robbery," said Minneapolis resident Sage Mills, who bought eggs to bake a birthday cake last week. "Eggs used to be kind of a staple food for us, but now you know, you might as well just go out to eat."

What is driving up prices?

The bird flu outbreak that started in 2022 is the main reason egg prices are up so much.

Anytime the virus is found on a poultry farm, the entire flock is slaughtered to help limit the virus' spread. And with massive egg farms routinely housing more than 1 million chickens, just a few infections can cause a supply crunch.

The problem tends to linger because it takes months to dispose of all the carcasses, disinfect barns and bring in new birds.

More than 145 million chickens, turkeys and other birds have been slaughtered since the current outbreak began, with the vast majority of them being egg-laying chickens.

Cage-free egg laws in 10 states may also be responsible for some supply disruptions and price increases. The laws set minimum space for chickens or cage-free requirements for egg-laying hens. They've already gone into effect in California, Massachusetts, Nevada, Washington, Oregon, Colorado and Michigan. At a Target in Chicago on Monday, a dozen large conventional eggs cost \$4.49 but a dozen large cage-free eggs were selling for \$6.19.

Why is the virus so hard to control?

Bird flu is primarily spread by wild birds such as ducks and geese as they migrate. While it is fatal to a variety of animals, those species can generally carry it without getting sick, which offers the virus a chance to mutate and thrive.

The virus can be spread through droppings or any interaction between farm-raised poultry and wild birds. It's also easily tracked into a farm on someone's boots or by vehicle.

Unlike previous outbreaks, the one that began in 2022 didn't die out in high summer temperatures.

The virus found another new host when dairy cattle started getting sick last March. That creates more opportunities for the virus to linger and spread and unlike poultry, cattle aren't slaughtered when they get sick because they rarely die from bird flu.

More than five dozen people have also become ill with bird flu and one person died since last March. Nearly all of them worked around sick animals. Health officials haven't yet found evidence of the disease spreading from person to person.

What is being done to stop the virus?

Farmers go to great lengths to protect their flocks.

Many poultry farms installed truck washes to disinfect vehicles entering their property and require workers to shower and change clothes before stepping inside a barn. They have also invested in duplicate sets of tools so nothing used in one barn is shared.

Some poultry farmers have even invested in lasers that shoot beams of green light in random patterns to discourage ducks and geese from landing.

Dairy farmers isolate any sick cattle and do additional testing before moving animals off the farm —

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especially if there has been a nearby outbreak or if the cows are being sent to a meat processing plant. The government is also testing milk.

Future vaccines might help, but it's not practical to vaccinate millions of chickens through shots, and other countries might refuse to purchase meat from vaccinated birds.

Health officials emphasize that any sick birds or cattle are kept out of the food supply. Cooking meat to 165 degrees (74 Celsius) kills bird flu, E. coli, salmonella or anything else. Pasteurization also kills the virus in milk. Raw milk is the only food product linked to illnesses so far.

How much has the outbreak cost so far?

It is impossible to know how much farmers have spent to seal barns, build shower houses for workers or to adopt other biosecurity measures.

"Over the last five years, my small farm alone has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on biosecurity," said Minnesota turkey farmer Loren Brey. "But not only that, it's the time daily that you're attending to biosecurity."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has spent at least \$1.14 billion compensating farmers for the birds they have had to kill. A similar number wasn't immediately available for how much has been spent to aid dairies.

USDA spokeswoman Shilo Weir said the department also spent more than \$576 million on its own response.

The prices of turkey, milk and chicken have also seen some pressure from bird flu.

Mike Vickers, a manager at Sentyrz Liquor & Supermarket in Minneapolis, said he can't even stock any organic, cage-free or brown eggs right now and is limited instead to selling large or jumbo eggs. He understands the pain customers are feeling.

"It's the first time in my life that I've ever had to be kind of embarrassed on what I'm selling eggs for," he said. "And it's not our fault. We're paying today \$7.45 for a dozen eggs. We're selling for \$7.59. We're making \$0.14. That's doesn't pay the bills."

## **Immigration officers are operating with a new sense of mission. Now, 'nobody gets a free pass'**

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

SILVER SPRING, Md. (AP) — A week into Donald Trump's second presidency and his efforts to crack down on illegal immigration, federal officers are operating with a new sense of mission, knowing that "nobody gets a free pass anymore."

A dozen officers from Immigration and Customs Enforcement gathered before dawn Monday in a Maryland parking lot, then fanned out to the Washington suburbs to find their targets: someone wanted in El Salvador for homicide, a person convicted of armed robbery, a migrant found guilty of possessing child sexual abuse material and another with drug and gun convictions. All were in the country illegally.

"The worst go first," Matt Elliston, director of ICE's Baltimore field office, said of the agency's enforcement priorities.

The Associated Press accompanied the officers, who offered a glimpse of how their work has changed under a White House intent on deporting large numbers of immigrants living in the U.S. without permission.

People considered public safety and national security threats are still the top priority, Elliston said.

That is no different from the Biden administration, but a big change has already taken hold: Under Trump, officers can now arrest people without legal status if they run across them while looking for migrants targeted for removal. Under Joe Biden, such "collateral arrests" were banned.

"We're looking for those public safety, national security cases. The big difference being, nobody has a free pass anymore," Elliston said.

The number of collateral arrests has fluctuated, he said. By the end of Monday across Maryland, ICE had arrested 13 people. Of those, nine were targets and the other four were people ICE came across during



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the course of the morning.

Of those "collaterals," one had an aggravated theft conviction. Another had already been deported once, and two others had final orders of removal.

Changes to immigration enforcement under Trump

The administration highlighted the participation of other agencies in immigration operations over the weekend, including the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, which are part of the Justice Department.

Emile Bove, the acting deputy attorney general, observed arrests Sunday in Chicago, a sign of the Justice Department's growing involvement.

ICE's daily arrests, which averaged 311 in the year ending Sept. 30, stayed fairly steady in the first days after Trump took office, then spiked dramatically Sunday to 956 and Monday to 1,179. If sustained, those numbers would mark the highest daily average since ICE began keeping records.

Trump also has lifted longtime guidelines that restricted ICE from operating at "sensitive locations" such as schools, churches or hospitals. That decision has worried many migrants and advocates who fear children will be traumatized by seeing their parents arrested in the drop-off line at school or that migrants needing medical care won't go to the hospital for fear of arrest.

Elliston pushed back on those fears, saying it's been exceedingly rare for ICE to enter one of those locations. In his 17 years on the job, he said he's gone into a school only once and that was to help stop an active shooter.

He said the removal of other guidelines that had restricted ICE operations at courthouses makes a bigger difference in the agency's work.

But getting rid of the sensitive locations policy does affect ICE in more subtle ways.

For example, at one point Monday, the team stopped at a parking lot in hopes of catching a Venezuelan gang member who was believed to be working as a delivery driver at a nearby business. Across the street was a church, and one street over was an elementary school, which under the previous guidance would have made it off limits to park to do surveillance.

Some enforcement policies have not changed

What has not changed, Elliston said, is that these are targeted operations. ICE has a list of people they're going after as opposed to indiscriminately going to a workplace or apartment building looking for people in the country illegally.

"I really hate the word 'raids' because it gives people the wrong impression, as if we're just arbitrarily going door to door and saying, 'Show us your papers,'" he said. "Nothing could be further from the truth."

In the week since Trump returned to office, Elliston said he's constantly been on the phone, trying to dispel rumors about what ICE is doing and who is getting arrested.

Since starting his job in 2022, Elliston said he's worked to build relations with elected officials and law enforcement agencies across Maryland, a state where many communities have sanctuary policies limiting their cooperation with federal immigration authorities.

Elliston has reached out to cities to educate them about what ICE does and whom officers pursue. He also tries to build relationships with city officials so they feel more comfortable letting authorities know when migrants who have been detained are going to be released. That way ICE can get them.

Another thing that hasn't changed? Sometimes when looking for someone, they come up empty.

In one apartment building in Takoma Park, just outside Washington, three ICE officers pounded on the door of an apartment, asking whoever was inside to come to the door.

"Miss, can you open up?" the officer said. "Can you come to the door and we'll talk to you? ... We're going to have to keep coming back until we clear this address."

Eventually a man who lived at the apartment came home and talked with the ICE officers. It turned out that the person they were looking for likely gave police the wrong address when he was arrested and he didn't live there.

If they cannot find a person, Elliston said, they keep looking.

"Looking for these guys will never stop," he said.

## Trump signs an order to revise the Pentagon's policy on transgender troops

By TARA COPP and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump signed an executive order directing Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to revise the Pentagon's policy on transgender troops, likely setting in motion a future ban on their military service.

He also on Monday ordered troops to be reinstated who had left voluntarily or been booted for refusing COVID-19 vaccines, outlined new rollbacks in diversity programs and provided for the deployment of a space-based missile defense shield for the U.S. — all on Hegseth's first day.

Trump and Hegseth had described parts of the anticipated orders throughout the day, but the exact language did not drop until late Monday.

### Transgender order

A transgender ban had been widely expected, and Trump's order largely sets the stage for a future ban — but directs Hegseth to come up with how that would be implemented in policy.

In his order, Trump claimed that service by troops who identify as a gender other than their biological one "conflicts with a soldier's commitment to an honorable, truthful, and disciplined lifestyle, even in one's personal life" and is harmful to military readiness, requiring a revised policy to address the matter.

Trump had tried to ban transgender troops during his first term, but it was tangled up in the courts for years before being overturned by then-President Joe Biden shortly after he took office.

Two groups, Lambda Legal and Human Rights Campaign, which represented transgender troops the first time, vowed to fight again.

"We have been here before and seven years ago were able to successfully block the earlier administration's effort," Lambda Legal attorney Sasha Buchert said. "Not only is such a move cruel, it compromises the safety and security of our country and is particularly dangerous and wrong. As we promised then, so do we now: we will sue."

### Space-based missile defense

During his first presidency, Trump established U.S. Space Command and the U.S. Space Force, which just marked its fifth birthday. Space continues to be a priority for the president, who has now directed the Pentagon to begin to develop the capability to shoot down missiles from space.

For years, the U.S. has cautioned that China, Russia and others were weaponizing space. It has at times declassified information about both countries' efforts to create offensive weapons to disable critical U.S. satellites, including the capability to move satellites from orbit, temporarily blind them or potentially even destroy them.

The Space Force is building a low-orbit ring of redundant satellites that can more quickly track and detect potential missile launches.

But establishing a way to shoot missiles down from space is something the U.S. has not pursued since President Ronald Reagan announced the Strategic Defense Initiative — "Star Wars" as it was commonly known — in the 1980s. The system was never developed due to cost and technological limitations.

In his order called "an Iron Dome for America," Trump called for a multilayer missile defense system capable of countering an array of threats to the U.S., to include development and deployment of space-based interceptors.

### COVID-19 vaccination

At least 8,200 troops were forced out of the military in 2021 for refusing to obey a lawful order when they declined to get the vaccine. Notices advising them they could return were sent out in 2023, but just 113 have reenlisted.

The reinstatement process for any who now want to return requires that they meet military entry standards. Trump and Hegseth have persistently stated that the military must not reduce standards.

"We will offer full reinstatement to any service member who was expelled from the armed forces due to the COVID vaccine mandate," Trump told a Republican crowd at the Trump National Doral Miami, a resort

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he owns. "And we will restore them to their former rank with full pay. "

In addition to troops forced out for refusing the shot, the order extends the same offer to anyone who signs a sworn statement saying they left the service voluntarily to avoid the vaccine.

The order isn't expected to have a major impact on the number of service members returning. But it could take a bite out of the budget if more do now, since it requires back pay.

To return, all would have to meet weight, fitness, medical and other requirements, and they could be refused if they now have a criminal record or other disqualifying factor. Officers would have to get re-commissioned, which is a simple appointment process.

According to the services, 3,748 Marines were discharged, and 25 have opted to re-enlist; 1,903 Army soldiers were discharged, and 73 returned; 1,878 sailors were discharged and two returned; 671 airmen were discharged and 13 returned.

The Pentagon made the COVID-19 vaccine mandatory in August 2021 for all service members, including the National Guard and Reserve. Then-Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said getting the vaccine was critical to maintaining a healthy, ready force that could be prepared to defend the nation.

The Pentagon formally dropped the mandate in January 2023.

Defense officials said then that many troops appeared to use the vaccine mandate as a way to quickly and easily to get out of their service obligations.

DEI initiatives

Trump also, as expected, issued a sweeping order to abolish all programs, initiatives and mentions of diversity, equity and inclusion across the Defense Department and the Coast Guard, which is governed by the Department of Homeland Security.

The order looks to scrub "any vestiges" of such initiatives that seek to "promote a race-based preferences system that subverts meritocracy, perpetuates unconstitutional discrimination, and promotes divisive concepts or gender ideology."

It prohibits the departments from promoting or following "un-American" theories that suggest that America's founding documents are racist or sexist; that discuss gender ideology; and that promote "divisive concepts" such as "race or sex stereotyping."

The order says the defense and homeland security secretaries must issue guidance to implement the order in 30 days. It calls for a review to find any instances of actions taken in pursuit of DEI, which will be due to the defense secretary in 90 days.

The secretaries must submit a report to the White House in six months outlining their progress.

The Pentagon had already been taking steps to comply with Trump's initial action ending DEI programs across the U.S. government, and it has had far-reaching consequences. Without clearer direction, agencies were taking a broad approach to removing any content that seemed to run afoul of Trump's ban.

That temporarily included videos of the storied Tuskegee Airmen and World War II Women's Airforce Service Pilots, or WASPs, which were part of DEI training courses for the Air Force's basic military training. Videos on both the Tuskegee Airmen and WASPs were removed as the courses were taken down last week, causing an uproar.

WASPs were vital in ferrying warplanes for the military. The Tuskegee Airmen were the nation's first Black military pilots, serving in a segregated WWII unit, and their all-Black 332nd Fighter Group had one of the lowest loss records of all the bomber escorts in the war.

On Sunday, the Air Force clarified that the DEI courses had been removed to be edited but that the Tuskegee Airmen and WASP content would continue to be taught.

## Google to change map names for Gulf of Mexico and Denali when US updates them based on Trump order

Associated Press undefined

Google says it will take its cue from the U.S. government if it has to change the names of the Gulf of Mexico and Denali on its maps.

The company said Monday that it will only make changes when the government updates its official listings for the body of water and the mountain.

After taking office, President Donald Trump ordered that the water bordered by the Southern United States, Mexico and Cuba be renamed to the Gulf of America. He also ordered America's highest mountain peak be changed back to Mt. McKinley.

"We have a longstanding practice of applying name changes when they have been updated in official government sources," Google said in a post on X.

The company said that Maps will reflect any updates to the Geographic Names Information System, a database of more than 1 million geographic features in the United States.

"When that happens, we will update Google Maps in the U.S. quickly to show Mount McKinley and Gulf of America," Google said.

"Denali" is the mountain's preferred name for Alaska Natives. Former President Barack Obama ordered it changed in 2015 from its previous name "McKinley," which was a tribute to President William McKinley, designated in the late 19th century by a gold prospector.

The Associated Press, which provides news around the world to multiple audiences, will refer to the Gulf of Mexico by its original name, which it has carried for 400 years, 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.

## Today in History: January 29, Bush warns of 'axis of evil'

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, Jan. 29, the 29th day of 2025. There are 336 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Jan. 29, 2002, in his first State of the Union address, President George W. Bush said terrorists were still threatening America — and warned of "an axis of evil" consisting of North Korea, Iran and Iraq.

Also on this date:

In 1891, following the death of her brother Kalākaua, Lili'uokalani was sworn in as the first and only queen of the Hawaiian Kingdom. (Her reign would end two years later when the Hawaiian monarchy was abolished following a U.S. military-supported coup d'état.)

In 1936, the first five inductees of baseball's Hall of Fame — Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Honus Wagner, Christy Mathewson, and Walter Johnson — were named in Cooperstown, New York.

In 1979, President Jimmy Carter formally welcomed Chinese Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping (dung shah-oh-ping) to the White House, following the establishment of diplomatic relations.

In 1995, the San Francisco 49ers became the first team in NFL history to win five Super Bowl titles, beating the San Diego Chargers, 49-26, in Super Bowl XXIX.

In 1998, a bomb rocked an abortion clinic in Birmingham, Alabama, killing security guard Robert Sanderson and critically injuring nurse Emily Lyons. (The bomber, Eric Rudolph, was captured in May 2003 and is serving a life sentence.)

In 2013, the Justice Department ended its criminal probe of the Deepwater Horizon disaster and Gulf of Mexico oil spill, with a U.S. judge agreeing to let London-based oil giant BP PLC plead guilty to manslaughter charges for the deaths of 11 rig workers and pay a record \$4 billion in penalties.

In 2017, six people were killed in a shooting at a Quebec City mosque during evening prayers. (Alexandre



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Bissonnette, who was arrested nearby, pleaded guilty to murder and attempted murder charges and was sentenced to life in prison.)

In 2018, the Cleveland Indians announced that they would remove the Chief Wahoo logo from their uniforms in the coming baseball season, after decades of protests and complaints that the grinning, red-faced caricature was racist. (The team changed its name to the Cleveland Guardians starting in the 2022 season.)

Today's birthdays: Feminist author Germaine Greer is 86. Actor Katharine Ross is 85. Actor Tom Selleck is 80. R&B singer Charlie Wilson is 72. TV host and media mogul Oprah Winfrey is 71. Olympic diving gold medalist Greg Louganis is 65. Actor Nicholas Turturro is 63. Football Hall of Famer Andre Reed is 61. Hockey Hall of Famer Dominik Hašek is 60. Actor-director Edward Burns is 57. Actor Heather Graham is 55. Actor Sara Gilbert is 50. Pop-rock singer Adam Lambert is 43.