

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Wednesday, Dec. 24

Senior Menu: Hot pork sandwich, coleslaw, baked beans, fruit.  
No School  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Christmas Eve Service, 7 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Christmas Eve Program, 4 p.m.  
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Britton service at 10 a.m.; Groton service at 5 p.m.; Conde service at 7 p.m.  
Groton CM&A: Service, 5 p.m.

## Thursday, Dec. 25

No School  
St. John's Lutheran: Christmas Day Service at Zion, 9 a.m.

## Fri., Dec. 26

Senior Menu: Hamburger cabbage roll hot dish, mixed vegetables, fruit, cornmeal muffin.  
No School

## Sat., Dec. 27



## Sun., Dec. 28

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; No Sunday School.  
St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.  
United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:30 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.  
4th Grade BB Practice, 2 p.m.  
6th Grade Boys Basketball, 6 p.m.

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# 1440

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

## A Holly Jolly Tally

About 88% of Americans will celebrate Christmas tomorrow, driving holiday sales expected to top \$1T for the first time. Parents are spending an average of \$521 per child—up 13% from 2024.

More than 122 million travelers are hitting the roads and skies between Dec. 20 and Jan. 1, a 2.2% increase over last year's record of 119.7 million. Fourteen states have a high chance of a white Christmas, defined as at least 1 inch of snow by 7 am. Many households display trees averaging 7 feet tall, and Americans consume about 240 million cups of creamy, nutmeg-spiced eggnog each year. Nearly one-third of all charitable giving happens in December, with 10% occurring in the final three days.

And then there's Santa. To reach an estimated 238 million homes worldwide in 34 hours, he must visit 7 million per hour—116,667 per minute or 1,944 per second.

## Economy Tops Expectations

The US economy grew at the fastest annual pace in two years in the third quarter of the year, according to delayed government data released yesterday.

The nation's gross domestic product—or the value of all the goods and services it produced—rose at a stronger-than-expected annual rate of 4.3% in the July-to-September period. The figure is above economists' forecasts of 3% and the 3.8% growth in the prior quarter.

Consumer spending, which accounts for roughly 70% of overall economic activity, rose at a 3.5% annualized rate, up from 2.5% in the April-to-June period, helping to fuel the stronger output. US exports expanded 8.8%, while imports, which subtract from the GDP, fell 4.7%. Government spending increased 2.2%, and investment in intellectual property, including artificial intelligence, grew 5.4%.

The total US GDP is roughly \$31T.

## More Epstein Documents

The Justice Department released a second batch of documents—nearly 30,000 pages—yesterday related to its investigation into convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

The release contains some details previously covered in news reports, including references to President Donald Trump on flight logs for Epstein's private jet. One 2020 email from a federal attorney stated Trump was a passenger on at least eight flights, more than had been previously reported. His name on the flight record does not indicate wrongdoing.

In a separate email by "A," the writer claimed to be staying at a British royal residence and asked convicted sex offender Ghislaine Maxwell if she had found him "new inappropriate friends." Further exchanges suggest the writer may be Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, who lost his royal titles after being accused of rape by one of Epstein's victims.

The DOJ said it is reviewing nearly 1 million documents for release. The department said it will redact victim information and denied censoring Trump-related items.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

NFL Pro Bowl Games' roster announced; Pro Bowl will take place Feb. 3.

Kansas City Chiefs announce plan to move from Missouri to Kansas to build \$3B domed stadium, expected to be ready for start of 2031 season.

Comedian Russell Brand charged in the UK with additional offenses of rape and sexual assault relating to two further women on top of charges filed in April.

"Call of Duty" cocreator Vince Zampella dies at age 55 in Los Angeles car crash.

Tennis star Venus Williams marries Italian model Andrea Preti.

## Science & Technology

Activist hacker group scrapes 86 million music files from Spotify, representing 99% of all listens on the streaming audio platform, and releases them publicly.

Engineers create custom structures that transform from flat to three-dimensional with the pull of a string; applications include rapid deployment of temporary structures during disaster response.

Neuroscientists develop method to record the release of glutamate in the brain, allowing a fuller picture of how brain cells communicate with each other.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.5%, Dow +0.2%, Nasdaq +0.6%), with S&P 500 notching another record close.

Novo Nordisk shares close up 7% after US regulators approve first GLP-1 weight-loss pill—a tablet form of Wegovy; Novo Nordisk plans to start selling the pill in the US next month.

Visa and Mastercard report 4.2% growth in US holiday retail sales between Nov. 1 and Dec. 21, less than the 4.8% growth during the same period last year.

## Politics & World Affairs

Supreme Court blocks National Guard deployment in Chicago, rejecting the administration's claim that conditions meet standards to federalize the Guard; ruling could signal similar blocks in Los Angeles, DC, and Portland.

Record-breaking heat—with temperatures 35 degrees above normal—is expected across large swaths of the US this week.

Ukrainian troops withdraw from eastern town of Siversk, a stronghold in eastern Donetsk, and territory Russia wanted Ukraine to cede as part of a peace deal.

## Conde National League

**Dec. 22 Team Standings:** Cubs 12, Stooges 7, Giants 6, Pirates 5, Mets 3, Braves 3.

**Men's High Games:** Dion Bahr 195, Chad Furney 193, Blake Ronning 166

**Men's High Series:** Chad Furney 499, Dion Bahr 484, Blake Ronning 474

**Women's High Games:** Sam Bahr 188, Deb Schuelke 182, Nancy Radke 170

**Women's High Series:** Deb Schuelke 491, Sandy Hoops 455, Suzie Easthouse 437

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## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### State seeks court order to stop abortion-pill ad campaign

**Nonprofit says its advertisements are free speech; meanwhile, court documents say many ads have already come down**

**BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN**

South Dakota's Republican attorney general asked a judge Tuesday for a court order to stop an abortion-rights ad campaign.

The request in Hughes County court comes after Attorney General Marty Jackley issued a cease-and-desist to Mayday Health, a New York-based nonprofit. The organization, which did not comply with the cease-and-desist, is running a gas-station advertising campaign that provides links to information about abortion pills with the tagline "Pregnant? Don't want to be?"

Mayday Health is dedicated to educating people about the safety and effectiveness of abortion pills. The organization did not grant South Dakota Searchlight an interview, but referred to an Instagram post from Executive Director Liv Raisner.

In the post, Raisner said the advertisements are constitutionally protected. Mayday Health provides links to information, but does not sell abortion pills directly from its website.

"We're not taking the signs down," Raisner said in the Instagram post. "It's First Amendment-protected free speech, and information is not illegal."

South Dakota lawmakers adopted an abortion trigger ban in 2005 that took effect in 2022, after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. Abortions are prohibited in the state, unless the mother's life is threatened by a pregnancy. State lawmakers also passed legislation in 2022 banning "medical abortion by telemedicine."

Jackley said the Mayday Health advertisements are illegally deceptive because the website leads consumers to believe that elective abortions and receiving abortion pills by mail are legal in the state. He also alleged that the ads are dangerous.

"These ads are targeting women — including teenagers — encouraging them to take these pills while misleading them about the potential physical risks," Jackley said in a news release. "At the same time, they promote secrecy by urging women not to inform their doctors and children not to tell their parents."

The campaign of gas-pump placards was set to launch at 30 gas stations around South Dakota on Dec. 8 and stay up for six weeks, according to Mayday. There were 14 locations that had the advertisements up as of Dec. 10, as confirmed by Mayday.

Several gas station owners have removed the advertisements voluntarily, according to the Attorney General's Office. The attorney general's lawsuit says only two locations still have the gas-station advertisements, in Brookings and Vermillion.

In its original news release, Mayday pledged a digital advertising campaign alongside the gas station ads. The group didn't specify how the digital ads would appear, but said they would include "real people in South Dakota sharing their perspectives on what it's like to live in a state with an abortion ban."

In 2023, medication abortions accounted for 63% of abortions in the country, according to data from the Guttmacher Institute. The drugs mifepristone and misoprostol, commonly used in medication abortions, are also listed on the World Health Organizations' list of essential medicines. Last year, the U.S. Supreme Court rejected an attempt by anti-abortion medical organizations to overturn the Food and Drug Administration's prescribing guidelines for mifepristone.

There is no date scheduled yet for a hearing on South Dakota's lawsuit. The state lists an advertising company, Minnesota-based AllOver Media, doing business as Momentara, as a defendant alongside Mayday.

*Meghan O'Brien is the audio reporter for South Dakota Searchlight where she covers the state government and its impact on South Dakotans. She's previously reported in Nebraska with a focus on health care and rural communities across the state.*

## South Dakota law protecting drug discounts for hospitals stays in effect as lawsuit proceeds

BY: JOHN HULT

A South Dakota law that prevents drug companies from restricting federal drug discounts for hospitals and other providers will remain in effect for now, a judge has decided.

Chicago-based AbbVie Inc., whose products include the wrinkle-remover Botox and the arthritis drug Humira, sued the state earlier this year in the U.S. District Court of South Dakota. The lawsuit challenges the legality of Senate Bill 154, which lawmakers and Gov. Larry Rhoden approved in March. It blocks drugmakers from deciding which pharmacies hospitals can use to access discounted medication.

Judge Roberto Lange did not dismiss AbbVie's case against the state of South Dakota, but declined to issue a preliminary injunction that would have barred the new law from taking effect while the case plays out.

The dispute centers on a provision in federal law known as 340B, which requires drugmakers who want to participate in Medicare and Medicaid to give steep discounts to providers like hospitals or clinics that serve low-income patients. Those health care providers, in turn, mark up the cost of those discounted drugs to make up the difference between their operating costs and the low reimbursement rates the Medicare and Medicaid programs pay for medical care.

Initially, only providers whose primary clientele were Medicare and Medicaid patients were eligible for the discounts, but the discounts were later extended to places dubbed "sole community providers," such as hospitals serving rural areas.

That dramatically expanded the number of providers who got the discounts, and spurred drug companies to limit the number of pharmacies from which hospitals and clinics could access the discounted drugs.

The drug company argues in the South Dakota case that the state overstepped its authority by passing a law that regulates interstate commerce, in this instance commerce involving pharmaceuticals.

It also argues that the new state law interferes with a federal pilot program meant to address some of the issues surrounding 340B payments by offering rebates to program participants, rather than upfront discounts.

In his ruling this week, Judge Lange said the state law will not prevent the drug company from participating in the federal pilot program, and that questions surrounding interstate commerce can be sorted out as the case proceeds.

*John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.*

## South Dakota outpaces neighbors in fatal prison overdoses

**Synthetic drugs suspected in deaths are particularly difficult to police, officials say**

BY: JOHN HULT

No state that borders South Dakota has publicly confirmed a lethal overdose in a state prison in 2025. South Dakota has reported eight.

Most of the suspected or confirmed overdose deaths are thought to be tied to a synthetic drug known as K2, which typically arrives in prisons on sheets of paper soaked with the chemical and dried out for smoking.

That's how the drug has appeared in South Dakota's prisons in each of the three K2 overdoses that

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have drawn criminal charges so far this year through the office of Attorney General Marty Jackley, who said Friday that another set of charges are pending for a similar case.

South Dakota's outsized prison death count extends beyond overdoses, and more than half the deaths have been preventable. With 25 total in-custody deaths for the year, the state outpaces every neighbor but Iowa, which has logged 29 deaths for an inmate population more than twice the size of South Dakota's.

Death certificates for four of the South Dakota inmates list suicide as the manner of death. Another suspected suicide remains under investigation.

Most of the information released publicly on the overdose deaths has come from Jackley's office. The state Department of Corrections has offered few details.

The department declined to offer responses to several security related inquiries from South Dakota Searchlight in recent weeks. The agency has also declined requests for an interview with former Iowa prison administrator Nick Lamb, who began his work as corrections secretary for South Dakota in mid-November after the resignation of his predecessor, Kellie Wasko.

## Changing formulations, changing dangers

Lamb told the Corrections Commission earlier this month that South Dakota is "no different" from other states in terms of its struggle with K2.

Three correctional officers at Anamosa State Penitentiary in Iowa were reportedly treated for exposure to K2-coated paper a few months ago.

Denny Kaemingk, a former corrections secretary for South Dakota who now serves as a consultant for a security company, said he hears horror stories about K2 from prison officials all over the U.S.

Kaemingk said he's confident in Lamb, based on the new secretary's years of service in multiple states. "He's a fixer," said Kaemingk, who was on the team of people who interviewed Lamb for the job of corrections secretary. "He sees problems and sets out to solve them. That's what we saw that he did in Illinois, Iowa and New Mexico."

## Inmate overdose deaths, 2025

Feb. 6: Anthony Richards, 20, state penitentiary (K2)

May 15: Jason Garreau, 39, state penitentiary (methamphetamine)

May 18: Joshua Arrow, 24, Jameson Annex of the state penitentiary (K2)

July 10: Nicholas Skorka, 42, state penitentiary (K2)

Sept. 23: Kaleb Lukkes, 25, state penitentiary (K2)\*

Nov. 7: Travis Long Fox, 33, state penitentiary (K2)

Nov. 17: Timothy Tyree, 46, Mike Durfee State Prison (K2)

Nov. 27: Larry Thomas Dukes Franklin, 37, state penitentiary (K2)\*

\* suspected cause, pending toxicology results

The company for which Kaemingk acts as a consultant, RaySecur, sells a scanner that's designed to detect the presence of any foreign substances on paper.

In some regions, Kaemingk said, jailers and prison officials put the scanner on a cart and wheel it from cell to cell to check papers in inmates' possession.

South Dakota has two of the scanning units, Kaemingk said, though the Department of Corrections declined to confirm as much, or to offer any other details on its drug mitigation efforts.

Technologies like scanners need to be able to detect any kind of substance, Kaemingk said, not specific chemicals, because synthetic drugs are frequently reformulated on the molecular level as state legislators vote to add chemicals to their list of banned substances.

The revamps have created a more potent product with more severe side effects.

"The recipe today might not be the recipe six months from now," said Kaemingk, who called the difference between the K2 he saw as secretary and what's now circulating "the difference between night and day."

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## DOC changes, concerns about staff

Former Corrections Secretary Wasko told reporters over the summer that friends and family members of inmates had been involved in some of the prison drug trafficking that's taken place over the past few years.

At a July press conference, in response to a question from South Dakota Searchlight, she said that a March 2024 shutdown of tablet-based inmate communications was tied to drugs.

"We had offenders who were conducting nefarious illicit drug transactions through messaging," Wasko said, marking the first public explanation for an incident that inspired two bouts of unrest and led to charges for 11 prisoners.

The Department of Corrections hasn't allowed in-person visits in Sioux Falls since Father's Day, in part in response to concerns about visitors passing drugs.

Four more people died of suspected drug use after the change.

"You can only blame so many things on contact visits," said Doug Weber, a former South Dakota penitentiary warden.

In addition to smuggling in body cavities — something that's a particular concern in work release facilities — Weber said that people could throw drugs over walls, drop them from drones, try to smuggle things in with the help of volunteers or medical staff, or try to take advantage of daily food service deliveries.

Threats to family members or people's careers might be used to convince those who come and go from the prison to play along with drug smuggling.

"There's definitely extortion stuff that goes on," Weber said.

Weber was critical of former Secretary Wasko's approach to security, particularly the frequent use of lockdowns, which he said can exacerbate security issues by frustrating inmates if they happen too often or last too long.

During his tenure, he said, there were daily cell sweeps for drugs, and officers worked to identify and target the inmates involved in trafficking.

More than one of 2025's overdose deaths have allegedly involved collusion between prison staff members and inmates. Jackley first announced indictments for drug trafficking this summer. His office charged a former correctional officer, a 22-year-old named Carson DeYoung, with supplying K2 in September, and announced charges against another inmate and a former prison medical aid named Natalie Krause on Friday.

Jackley said he's been in conversations with Secretary Lamb about potential security upgrades in the state's prisons, and that Lamb is "open to working with us."

He'd also like to see lawmakers stiffen the penalty for collusion between inmates and state employees. This year, lawmakers passed a bill to make it a misdemeanor for supervisors to look the other way when they see unethical or illegal behavior. Jackley wanted felony penalties.

This year, he said, he's working with lawmakers on a bill that could attach a possible 50-year prison term to anyone involved with distributing drugs that result in an in-custody overdose.

The details might change, Jackley said, but "this is where the conversation has been going."

## Security measures

The smuggling of K2 on sheets of paper changed the mail policies in South Dakota's prisons years ago. Instead of being delivered, the letters are scanned and sent to inmates on prison-issued tablets.

Kaemingk and Weber both said that inmates are always looking for new ways to beat the system. Some will swallow balloons filled with dope, Weber said, and "just wait a few days" to retrieve it from the toilet.

Minnehaha County Sheriff Mike Milstead runs a jail that churns through 18,000 bookings a year in Sioux Falls. That dynamic — short-term jail stays versus the longer-term sentences served by prison inmates — and the jail's lack of outdoor areas make it more difficult for drugs to get in, he said, but that doesn't mean the jail catches everything.

The jail doesn't have a scanner for paper, Milstead said, but it does scan inmate mail instead of handing it to inmates. It also has a body scanner, similar to an airport security scanner, used to search anyone who's booked.

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Gov. Larry Rhoden, during a recent press conference, said the state has ordered two such scanners for the penitentiary. Lamb told the state's Correctional Rehabilitation Task Force that the state is working on security changes at the prison and mentioned scanners, but said he "cannot go into details."

It's not unusual to find drugs stashed in a body cavity at booking time, according to Milstead.

"You'd be surprised at how many people carry it there regularly," he said.

But the scanners don't necessarily catch everything, and inmates never stop looking for new opportunities to smuggle in contraband.

"We've got people who spend every minute of every day," Milstead said, "trying to find the most creative ways to get illegal drugs in."

## South Dakota prison deaths compared to other states

Twenty-five state prison inmates have died, including eight by confirmed or suspected drug overdoses, this year in South Dakota. The state has about 3,900 prisoners.

The death numbers stand out in the region:

Twelve inmates have died in Nebraska state prison custody, according to the agency's news release archive. No release mentions overdose as a cause. Department of Correctional Services spokeswoman Dayne Urbanovsky did not reply to calls or emails about overdoses. Nebraska's prison population stands at around 5,900.

Fourteen people have died in Minnesota state prison custody this year. None died of an overdose, from K2 or any other drug, spokeswoman Shannon Loehrke said. Minnesota has around 8,000 state prison inmates.

North Dakota, with a prison population of around 2,200, has had no inmate deaths this year, according to corrections spokeswoman Kayli Richards.

Wyoming, with a state inmate population of just over 2,000, has had eight in-custody deaths this year, "none of which were suspicious or narcotic related," spokeswoman Stephanie Dack said.

There are 3,400 people in prison in Montana. Sixteen inmates have died in 2025, according to the state's "Mortality in Corrections" online dashboard. The cause of some deaths remains under investigation, but no 2025 death is listed as "accidental," the category spokeswomanCarolynn Stocker said could include a drug overdose.

Iowa corrections spokesman Zach Carlyle did not return calls or emails on the subject of deaths in custody. His prison system's news release archive shows 29 deaths in custody for 2025. None of the news releases mentions causes of death. The majority list hospice, palliative care or an outside health care facility as the location of death. Iowa is home to around 8,500 inmates

*John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.*

## US Supreme Court in defeat for Trump blocks deployment of National Guard in Chicago

BY: JACOB FISCHLER

President Donald Trump for now has not met the requirements to send National Guard troops to Chicago, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled Tuesday afternoon in a major setback for the president.

The court's majority rejected the Trump administration's request to stay, or halt, a lower court's order barring federalization of National Guard troops to assist federal immigration enforcement officers in Chicago.

The president is only empowered to federalize National Guard units when the troops are enforcing laws that regular military forces are legally allowed to enforce, the court said in a ruling from its emergency docket that will apply while the merits of the case are argued.

The Posse Comitatus Act, passed in 1878, generally prevents the military from participating in civilian law enforcement.

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The decision on the eve of a five-day holiday weekend for the federal government appeared to be 6-3, with three conservative justices, Samuel Alito, Clarence Thomas and Neil Gorsuch, dissenting. The ruling represented the first time the high court has weighed in on Trump's use of the guard in several cities, though other legal fights continue.

The administration had not shown why the situation in Chicago, in which residents have protested aggressive immigration enforcement, should present an exception to the law, the court majority said.

"At this preliminary stage, the Government has failed to identify a source of authority that would allow the military to execute the laws in Illinois," the majority opinion said.

In an emailed statement, White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson said the ruling would not detract from Trump's "core agenda."

"The President promised the American people he would work tirelessly to enforce our immigration laws and protect federal personnel from violent rioters," Jackson wrote. "He activated the National Guard to protect federal law enforcement officers, and to ensure rioters did not destroy federal buildings and property."

## Protecting federal officers

In a concurring opinion, Justice Brett Kavanaugh, whom Trump appointed during his first term, wrote that he agreed with the decision to deny the motion for a stay, but would have done so on narrower grounds.

The majority opinion was overly restrictive and would block the president from using National Guard forces to protect federal property and personnel, Kavanaugh said.

Alito wrote in a dissent, joined by Thomas, that their interpretation of the majority's order could have far-reaching consequences that undermine the traditional role of the guard.

It would free National Guard members to enforce immigration law, but not to provide protection to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers who are assigned that function, Alito wrote.

"Whatever one may think about the current administration's enforcement of the immigration laws or the way ICE has conducted its operations, the protection of federal officers from potentially lethal attacks should not be thwarted," Alito wrote. "I therefore respectfully dissent."

## Implications for other cities

The ruling is only in effect while the case, in which Illinois is challenging the administration's deployment there, proceeds.

But it marks a rebuke, including from a Trump appointee, of the administration's strategy of deploying National Guard troops to assist in its aggressive immigration enforcement.

Trump has ordered troops to Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Memphis, Tennessee, and Portland, Oregon, to either counter crime generally or assist federal immigration officials. Governors of Democratic-led states have strenuously pushed back against those deployments. Republican attorneys general have argued their states are harmed by the protests in Chicago and other cities that impede federal ICE officers from doing their jobs.

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzler in a statement praised the ruling. "Today is a big win for Illinois and American democracy," he said. "I am glad the Supreme Court has ruled that Donald Trump did not have the authority to deploy the federalized guard in Illinois. This is an important step in curbing the Trump Administration's consistent abuse of power and slowing Trump's march toward authoritarianism."

*Jacob covers federal policy and helps direct national coverage as deputy Washington bureau chief for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.*

## Trump administration to garnish wages for defaulted student loans

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's administration will start garnishing the wages of student loan borrowers in default beginning early next year, the U.S. Education Department said Tuesday.

In an email, the department said it expects the first notices to be sent to roughly 1,000 borrowers in default the first full week of January and that the number of notices would increase each month. Wages could be garnished as early as 30 days after borrowers receive notice.

The agency noted that collections activities would be conducted only after borrowers were given sufficient notice and the opportunity to pay back their loans.

Persis Yu, deputy executive director and managing counsel for the advocacy group Protect Borrowers, blasted the decision as "cruel, unnecessary, and irresponsible" in a Tuesday statement.

"As millions of borrowers sit on the precipice of default, this Administration is using its self-inflicted limited resources to seize borrowers' wages instead of defending borrowers' right to affordable payments," Yu added.

The agency resumed collections for defaulted federal student loans in May, following a pause that started during the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a consequence of defaulting on one's student loans, a borrower can have their wages garnished, and the "loan holder can order your employer to withhold up to 15% of your disposable pay to collect your defaulted debt" without being taken to court, according to Federal Student Aid, an office of the Education Department.

With wage garnishment, borrowers have the right to "be sent a notice that explains ED's intention to garnish your wages in 30 days, the nature and amount of your debt, your opportunity to inspect and copy records relating to your debt, your right to object to garnishment, and your option to avoid garnishment by voluntary repayments," according to FSA.

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

## Trump appears in several files of latest Epstein release

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Justice early Tuesday released thousands more files related to the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, with several referencing President Donald Trump.

The latest trove — which features nearly 30,000 more pages of documents related to Epstein — includes a note implicating Trump purportedly written by Epstein that the department later declared to be fake and an email from a prosecutor claiming Trump flew on Epstein's private jet more times than previously reported.

In a social media post announcing the Tuesday release, the department issued a blanket denial that Trump was involved in Epstein's crimes, saying the evidence included in the files was discredited.

"Some of these documents contain untrue and sensationalist claims made against President Trump that were submitted to the FBI right before the 2020 election," the post said.

The agency added "the claims are unfounded and false, and if they had a shred of credibility, they certainly would have been weaponized against President Trump already."

The department has faced backlash for its piecemeal rollout of the files beginning Dec. 19, despite a legal mandate to release the full set on that date.

Trump had a well-documented friendship with Epstein, but has maintained he had a falling out with the disgraced financier and was never involved in any alleged crimes.

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## Flights

A 2020 email from an assistant U.S. attorney in New York says flight records indicate that Trump “traveled on Epstein’s private jet many more times than previously has been reported.”

The email notes that Trump was “listed as a passenger on at least eight flights between 1993 and 1996” and that this includes “at least four flights” on which Epstein’s accomplice Ghislaine Maxwell “was also present.”

The files also include a letter that Epstein appeared to have sent to convicted serial sex offender Larry Nassar in 2019 but that the Justice Department declared to be “fake,” pointing to several discrepancies.

The Justice Department said the handwriting did not match Epstein’s, noted it was postmarked after his death in Northern Virginia, not New York, and did not include Epstein’s jail name or inmate number — a requirement for outgoing mail.

The department said the “fake letter serves as a reminder that just because a document is released by the Department of Justice does not make the allegations or claims within the document factual.”

The letter, which appeared to have been sent from Epstein to Nassar, a disgraced former USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University doctor, said Trump shared their interest in young girls.

The letter was postmarked Aug. 13, 2019, just three days after Epstein died in his jail cell at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in New York City.

Another email in the Tuesday release references more potential co-conspirators, according to U.S. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer.

Schumer called on the Justice Department to release more information on a note he said indicates the DOJ “was looking into at least ten potential Jeffrey Epstein co-conspirators.”

The New York Democrat said the department “needs to shed more light on who was on the list, how they were involved, and why they chose not to prosecute.”

He added: “Protecting possible co-conspirators is not the transparency the American people and Congress are demanding.”

## DOJ takes heat

The Justice Department has faced heat for opting to release the files in batches instead of adhering to the congressionally mandated full release of the files by mid-December.

The requirement comes from a bill Trump signed into law in November, which requires the agency to make publicly available “all unclassified records, documents, communications, and investigative materials in DOJ’s possession that relate to the investigation and prosecution of Jeffrey Epstein,” including materials related to Maxwell.

The measure — co-sponsored by GOP Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky and Democratic Rep. Ro Khanna of California — gave the department 30 days after the bill was enacted into law to release the files, or Dec. 19.

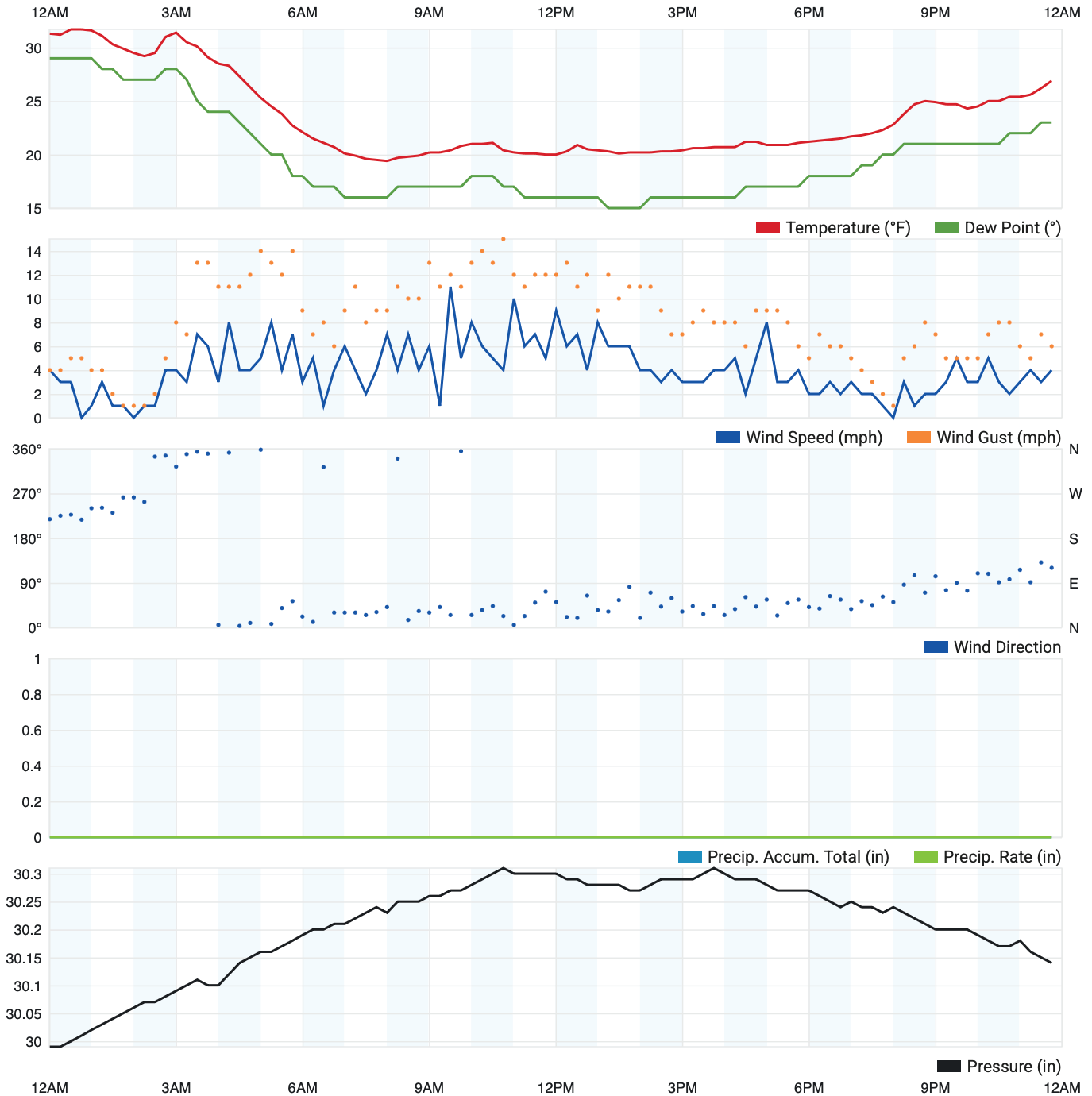
*Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom’s Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.*

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

December 23, 2025



# Groton Daily Independent

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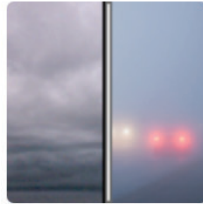
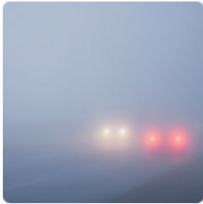
Today

Tonight

Christmas Day

Thursday  
Night

Friday



High: 32 °F

Low: 18 °F

High: 35 °F

Low: 25 °F

High: 35 °F

Areas  
Freezing Fog  
and Patchy  
Fog

Mostly Cloudy

Cloudy then  
Patchy Fog

Slight Chance  
Drizzle/Freezing  
Rain and  
Patchy Fog

Mostly Sunny

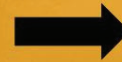


National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Updated: 12/24/2025 2:15 AM Central

## Temperatures

Today  
30s & 40s



Christmas Day  
30s & 40s  
50s in Central SD

*Be on the lookout for patchy fog  
and drizzle / freezing drizzle*

*Especially along and east of I-29  
Christmas Morning*

**Take caution if driving for the Holiday**

Warmer temperatures will move into the area today and Christmas Day with highs in the 30s and 40s. Central South Dakota will see highs in the 50s on Christmas Day. The warmer air will also bring patchy fog and drizzle / freezing drizzle. Areas along and east of I-29 will have the best potential of seeing freezing drizzle Christmas morning.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 32 °F at 12:38 AM

Low Temp: 19 °F at 7:52 AM

Wind: 16 mph at 10:38 AM

Precip: : 0.00

## Today's Info

Record High: 50 in 1943

Record Low: -24 in 1996

Average High: 26

Average Low: 5

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.46

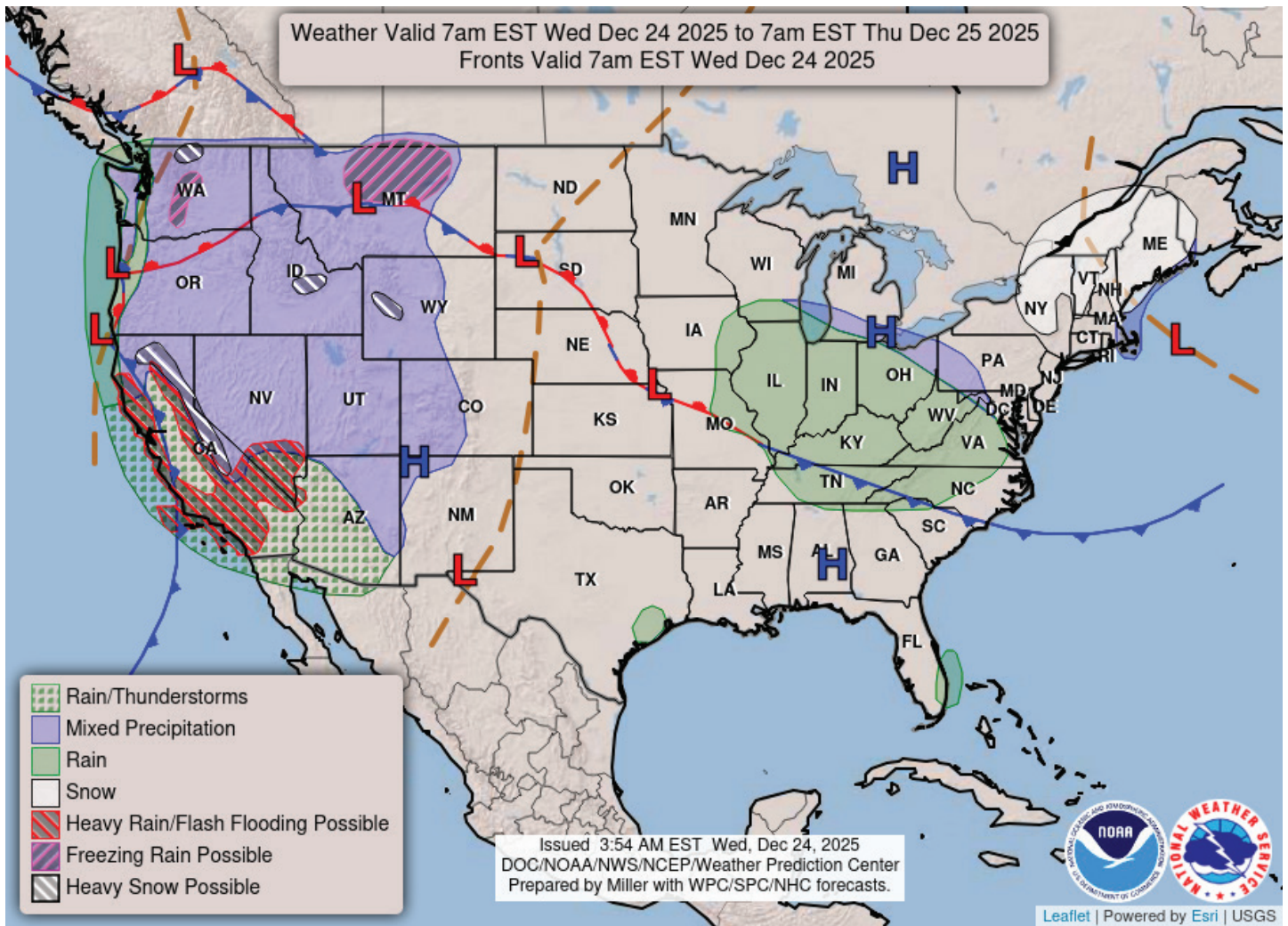
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.67

Average Precip to date: 21.67

Precip Year to Date: 25.48

Sunset Tonight: 4:53 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:11 am



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## Today in Weather History

December 24, 1985: Snow fell over western South Dakota on December 23, with the greatest amounts in the northern Black Hills. Strong winds gusting to 50-60 mph developed over the western part of the state on the evening of December 23rd and continued into the morning of the 24th, with gusts to above 40 mph in the east. The winds caused ground blizzard conditions in the northern and central sections of South Dakota, and many vehicles were reported in ditches. Many people were stranded for a time in Martin in Bennett County. Several roads were blocked entirely during this time, such as Highway 248 near Murdo in Jones County.

December 24, 1992: A deep area of low pressure traveled across the United States/Canada border, dragging a cold front southward across South Dakota and Minnesota by Christmas Day. Southerly winds gusted up to 50 mph over western Minnesota on the 23rd in advance of the storm, causing ground blizzard conditions. As the arctic cold front swept across the area, temperatures tumbled from the 20s and 30s to well below zero by Christmas morning. Wind gusts were up to 50 mph behind the front, causing ground blizzard conditions and wind chill readings from 40 to 60 degrees below zero. A church that was under construction in Litchfield in Meeker County, Minnesota, was destroyed by strong winds. Many motorists were stranded on Christmas Eve and spent the night at area homes and motels. Interstate 94 from Alexandria to Moorhead, MN, was closed for nearly eight hours. High winds gusted up to 55 mph in the Watertown, SD area, causing a steel frame building under construction to collapse sometime between 9 and 10 pm CST.

December 24, 2009: A broad upper-level low-pressure area over the Upper Midwest associated with an intense surface low-pressure area brought widespread heavy snow along with blizzard conditions to central and northeast South Dakota as well as west-central Minnesota. The storm was a slow mover and produced several rounds of snow over three days. Total snowfall amounts were from 7 to as much as 25 inches. The heavy snow combined with winds of 25 to 40 mph with gusts to 50 mph brought widespread blowing and drifting snow with visibilities frequently less than a quarter of a mile. This blizzard ranked in the top three for South Dakota snowfall with a state average of 15.4 inches. Most of the state received 10 inches of snow or more with many locations with 20 inches or more. Pollock in north-central South Dakota set an all-time high three-day snowfall total with 17 inches. Before the onset of the storm, the Governor declared a state of emergency for South Dakota. Large portions of both Interstates 29 and 90 across South Dakota were closed late on Thursday, December 24th. Both Interstates were closed through Christmas Day and into Saturday, December 26th. There were some stranded holiday travelers due to the road closings, along with a few rescues. Most roads were reopened by Sunday morning, December 27th. There were also several vehicle accidents with nothing serious. Several airports were also closed throughout the storm, along with a few spotty power outages occurring in Lyman County in central South Dakota. Total snowfall amounts over the three days predominantly ranged from 1 to 2 feet. Snowfall amounts with a foot or more included; 12 inches at Mobridge, Eureka, Waubay, and Eagle Butte; 13 inches at Highmore and Miller; 14 inches at

Castlewood, Summit, Watertown, Pierre, and Ree Heights; 15 inches at Groton, Gettysburg, Webster, Wilmot, Hayti, and McLaughlin; 16 inches at McIntosh, east of Hayes and east of Hosmer; 17 inches at Timber Lake, Britton, and Pollock; 18 inches near Victor; 20 inches near Keldron; 22 inches at Murdo; 23 inches at Sisseton and 25 inches at Kennebec. In west-central Minnesota Wheaton received 11 inches, Browns Valley received 15 inches with 16 inches at Ortonville and Artichoke Lake.

1851: The Library of Congress caught fire. About 35,000 of the Library's 55,000 volumes were destroyed.

1963: At 0326 CDT on December 24th, 1963, a new all-time low for Memphis occurred with a reading of -13°F. The record still stands today.

1968: The crew of Apollo 8 took this photo, later dubbed "Earthrise," on December 24th, 1968. During a broadcast that night, pilot Jim Lovell said: "The vast loneliness is awe-inspiring, and it makes you realize just what you have back there on Earth."

## Conflict at Christmas

**This Christmas, pray that those who are lost would come to know the hope, peace, and love of Jesus Christ.**

Matthew 2:12-18: 12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

13 Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him."

14 So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt.

15 He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON."

16 Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi.

17 Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

18 "A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH, WEEPING AND GREAT MOURNING, RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN; AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED, BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE."

Look around you. At this time of year, it's easy to find people who eagerly celebrate the secular aspects of Christmas, such as meeting Santa Claus or watching holiday movies. But some of them might be less accepting of the true cause of "joy to the world."

This hostility isn't new. Herod was angry when he realized that the Magi hadn't returned to share the location of the King of the Jews. Herod's fury was fueled by his desire for power and control. He didn't want another king to dethrone him. Perhaps some people today scorn the celebration of Christ's birth for the same reason—they don't want anyone else "ruling their life."

Romans 1:18 says that people who reject Jesus have suppressed the truth. Others won't come to the Light for fear that their deeds will be exposed (John 3:19-20). However, we shouldn't assume salvation is impossible for someone who is hostile to Jesus. After all, Paul persecuted the church until his conversion, and he became one of its greatest witnesses.

Sometimes people who push back against the true meaning of Christmas may feel like a lost cause. But remember that no one is beyond the reach of Jesus. So make space in your heart for those who don't know the Lord, and pray they would be open to seeing Christmas in a new way.

*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:  
12.23.25

15 37 38 41 64 21

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$125,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 10  
Mins 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.22.25

1 9 18 19 44 2

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$10,410,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 25 Mins 36  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.23.25

2 4 12 37 42 10

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

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 40 Mins 36  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.20.25

4 15 17 23 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$136,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 40 Mins 36  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.22.25

14 32 47 48 69 17

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 9 Mins 36  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.22.25

3 18 36 41 54 7

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$1,700,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 9 Mins 36  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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

### Search teams probe wreckage after Libyan army chief and 7 others are killed in Turkey plane crash

By SUZAN FRASER and FAY ABUELGASIM Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Search teams on Wednesday recovered the cockpit voice and flight data recorders from the jet that crashed and killed Libya's military chief and other senior officers, while efforts to retrieve the victims' remains were still underway, Turkey's interior minister said.

The private jet carrying Gen. Muhammad Ali Ahmad al-Haddad, four other officers and three crew members crashed in Turkey on Tuesday after taking off from the capital, Ankara, killing everyone on board. Libyan officials said the cause of the crash was a technical malfunction on the plane.

The high-level Libyan delegation was on its way back to Tripoli after holding defense talks in Ankara aimed at boosting military cooperation between the two countries.

Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya told journalists at site of the crash that wreckage was scattered across an area covering three square kilometers (about 1.2 square miles), complicating recovery efforts. Authorities from the Turkish forensic medicine authority were working to recover and identify the remains, he said.

A 22-person delegation — including five family members — arrived from Libya early on Wednesday to assist in the investigation, he said.

Libyan Prime Minister Abdul-Hamid Dbeibah confirmed the deaths on Tuesday, describing the incident on Facebook as a "tragic accident" and a "great loss" for Libya.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan held a telephone call with Dbeibah during which conveyed his condolences and expressed his sorrow over the deaths, his office said.

Al-Hadad was the top military commander in western Libya and played a crucial role in the ongoing, U.N.-brokered efforts to unify Libya's military, which has split, much like Libya's other institutions.

The four other officers who died in the crash were Gen. Al-Fitouri Ghraibil, the head of Libya's ground forces, Brig. Gen. Mahmoud Al-Qatawi, who led the military manufacturing authority, Mohammed Al-Asawi Diab, advisor to the chief of staff, and Mohammed Omar Ahmed Mahjoub, a military photographer with the chief of staff's office.

The identities of the three crew members were not immediately released.

Turkish officials said the Falcon 50 type business jet took off from Ankara's Esenboga airport at 8:30 p.m. and that contact was lost some 40 minutes later. The plane notified air traffic control of an electrical fault and requested an emergency landing. The aircraft was redirected back to Esenboga, where preparations for its landing began.

The plane, however, disappeared from the radar while descending for the emergency landing, the Turkish presidential communications office said.

The Libyan government declared a three-day period of national mourning. Flags would be flown half-mast at all state institutions, according to the government's announcement on Facebook.

The wreckage was found near the village of Kesikkavak, in Haymana, a district some 70 kilometers (about 45 miles) south of Ankara.

At the crash site, search and recovery teams intensified their operations on Wednesday after a night of heavy rain and fog, the state-run Anadolu Agency reported. Gendarmerie police sealed off the area while the Turkish disaster management agency, AFAD, set up a mobile coordination center. Specialized vehicles, such as tracked ambulances, were deployed because of the muddy terrain.

Turkey has assigned four prosecutors to lead the investigation and Yerlikaya said the Turkish search and recovery teams numbered 408 personnel.

While in Ankara, al-Haddad had met with Turkish Defense Minister Yasar Guler and other officials.

Libya plunged into chaos after the country's 2011 uprising toppled and killed longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi. The country split, with rival administrations in the east and west, backed by an array of rogue

militias and foreign governments.

Turkey has been allied with Libya's government in the west, but has recently taken steps to improve ties with the eastern-based government as well.

Tuesday's visit by the Libyan delegation came a day after Turkey's parliament approved to extend the mandate of Turkish troops serving in Libya for two years. Turkey deployed troops following a 2019 security and military cooperation agreement that was reached between Ankara and the Tripoli-based government.

## '60 Minutes' segment on Trump immigration policy accidentally airs online

By SAFIYAH RIDDLE Associated Press

A news segment about the Trump administration's immigration policy that was abruptly pulled from "60 Minutes" was mistakenly aired on a TV app after the last minute decision not to air it touched off a public debate about journalistic independence.

The segment featured interviews with migrants who were sent to a notorious El Salvador prison called the Terrorism Confinement Center, or CECOT, under President Donald Trump's aggressive crackdown on immigration.

The story was pulled from Global Television Network, one of Canada's largest networks, but still ran on the network's app. Global Television Network swiftly corrected the error, but copies of it continued to float around the internet and pop up before being taken down.

"Paramount's content protection team is in the process of routine take down orders for the unaired and unauthorized segment," a CBS spokesperson said Tuesday via email.

A representative of Global Television Network did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

In the story, two men who were deported reported torture, beatings and abuse. One Venezuelan said he was punished with sexual abuse and solitary confinement.

Another was a college student who said guards beat him and knocked out his tooth upon arrival.

"When you get there, you already know you're in hell. You don't need anyone to tell you," he said.

The segment featured numerous experts who called into question the legal basis for deporting migrants so hastily amid pending judicial decisions. Reporters for the show also corroborated findings by Human Rights Watch suggesting that only eight of the deported men had been sentenced for violent or potentially violent crimes, using available ICE data.

The decision to pull a story critical of the Trump administration was met with widespread accusations that CBS leadership was shielding the president from unfavorable coverage.

The journalist who reported the story, Sharyn Alfonsi, said in an email sent to fellow "60 Minutes" correspondents that the story was factually correct and had been cleared by CBS lawyers and its standards division.

CBS News chief Bari Weiss said Monday that the story did not "advance the ball" and pointed out that the Trump administration had refused to comment for the story. Weiss said she wanted a greater effort made to get its point of view and said she looked forward to airing Alfonsi's piece "when it's ready."

The dispute put one of journalism's most respected brands — and a frequent target of Trump — back in the spotlight and amplified questions about whether Weiss' appointment is a signal that CBS News is headed in a more Trump-friendly direction.

## Pro-Russian hackers claim cyberattack on French postal service

PARIS (AP) — A pro-Russian hacking group claimed responsibility for a major cyberattack that halted package deliveries by France's national postal service just days before Christmas, prosecutors said Wednesday.

After the claim by the cybercrime group known as Noname057, French intelligence agency DGSI took over the investigation into the hacking attack, the Paris prosecutor's office said in a statement to The Associated Press.

The group has been accused of other cyberattacks in Europe, including around a NATO summit in the Netherlands and French government sites. It was the target of a big European police operation earlier this year.

Central computer systems at French national postal service La Poste were knocked offline Monday in a distributed denial of service, or DDoS, cyberattack that still wasn't fully resolved by Wednesday morning, the company said.

Postal workers couldn't track package deliveries, and online payments at the company's banking arm were also disrupted. It was a major blow to La Poste, which delivered 2.6 billion packages last year and employs more than 200,000 people, during the busiest season of the year.

France and other European allies of Ukraine allege that Russia is waging a campaign of "hybrid warfare" to sow division in Western societies and undermine their support for Ukraine. The AP has tracked more than 145 incidents including sabotage, assassinations, cyberattacks, disinformation and other hostile acts that are increasingly draining police resources.

## Explosion in Russian capital kills 3

MOSCOW (AP) — Three people, including two police officers, were killed in an explosion in Moscow on Wednesday, Russian investigators said, just days after a car bomb killed a high-ranking general not far away.

The two traffic police officers were approaching a "suspicious individual" when an explosive device detonated, Investigate Committee spokesperson Svetlana Petrenko said in a statement. The two officers, as well as another person standing nearby, died from their injuries.

Investigators and forensic experts are working at the scene, Petrenko said.

The incident took place in the same area of the Russian capital where Lt. Gen. Fanil Sarvarov was killed by a car bomb on Monday morning.

Sarvarov, the head of the Operational Training Directorate of the Russian Armed Forces' General Staff, died when an explosive device detonated under his vehicle in southern Moscow.

Investigators said Ukraine may have been behind the attack, which was the third such killing of a senior military officer in just over a year.

## Powerball's \$1.7B jackpot could make Christmas Eve unforgettable for a lucky winner

By OLIVIA DIAZ Associated Press/Report for America

A Christmas Eve Powerball drawing could add new meaning to holiday cheer as millions of players hope to cash in on the \$1.7 billion prize, which comes after months without a jackpot winner.

The United States' 4th-largest jackpot on record comes after 46 consecutive draws without someone claiming to have all six numbers. The last contest with a jackpot winner was on Sept. 6. The game's long odds have people decking the halls and doling out \$2 — and sometimes more — for tickets ahead of Wednesday night's live drawing.

It's a sign the game is operating as intended. Lottery officials made the odds tougher in 2015 as a mechanism for snowballing jackpots, all the while making it easier to win smaller prizes.

The Christmas holiday is not expected to impact the drawing process should there be a winning ticket, a Powerball spokesperson said.

Here is what to know about Wednesday's drawing:

Christmas Eve cha-ching

That ticket placed in a stocking or under the tree could be worth a billion bucks — but with some caveats.

Powerball is played in 45 states, along with Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Most of those areas require players to be 18 or older, though some states have steeper requirements. In Nebraska, players have to be at least 19 years old, and in Louisiana and Arizona, people can't buy tickets until they are 21.

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Winning tickets also must be cashed in the states where they were bought. And players can't buy tickets in Alabama, Alaska, Hawaii, Nevada or Utah.

Other than that, lottery officials argue there is a chance a lucky Powerball ticket could be a gift that keeps on giving.

Charlie McIntyre, the New Hampshire Lottery's executive director, said Tuesday: "Just think of the stories you can tell for generations to come about the year you woke up a billionaire on Christmas."

A range of prizes can be presents

Wednesday's \$1.7 billion jackpot has a cash value of \$781.3 million.

A winner can choose to be paid the whole amount through an annuity, with an immediate payment and then annual payments over 29 years that increase by 5% each time. Most winners, however, usually choose the cash value for a lump sum.

The odds are high for the top prize, but there are smaller prizes players can reap.

At the last drawing, players in Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Wisconsin each won \$1 million. There are also prizes outside the jackpot, ranging from a few dollars to \$2 million.

One woman told Powerball officials that she already made plans for her \$1 million win: "We're going to pay off our cars and credit cards and get a bigger house!"

And Thomas Anderson of Burlington, North Carolina, said he intended to use his \$100,000 Powerball win from earlier this month to go back to school, according to Powerball.

Long odds for the billion-dollar jackpots

Lottery officials set the odds at 1 in 292.2 million in hopes that jackpots will roll over with each of the three weekly drawings until the pool balloons so much that more people take notice and play.

The odds used to be notably better, at 1 in 175 million. But the game was made tougher in 2015 to create the out-of-this-world bounties. The tougher odds partly helped set the stage for back-to-back record-breaking sweepstakes this year.

The last time someone won the Powerball pot was on Sept. 6, when players in Missouri and Texas won \$1.787 billion, which was the second-highest top prize in U.S. history.

The U.S. has seen more than a dozen lottery jackpot prizes exceed \$1 billion since 2016. The biggest U.S. jackpot ever was \$2.04 billion back in 2022.

More about those unfavorable odds

It's hard to explain what odds of 1 in 292.2 million mean. Even if halved, they remain difficult to digest.

In the past, one math professor described the odds of flipping a coin and getting heads 28 straight times.

Tim Chartier, a Davidson College math professor in North Carolina, on Monday compared the odds of a winning lottery ticket to selecting one marked dollar bill from a stack 19 miles (31 kilometers) high.

"It's true that if you buy 100 tickets, you are 100 times more likely to win. But in this case, '100 times more likely' barely moves the probability needle," Chartier said. "Using the time analogy, buying 100 tickets is like getting 100 guesses to name that one chosen second over nine years. Possible — but wildly improbable."

## Explosion at a Pennsylvania nursing home kills at least 2, governor says

By TASSANEE VEJPONGSA, MARK SCOLFORO and MARC LEVY Associated Press

BRISTOL, Pa. (AP) — A thunderous explosion Tuesday at a nursing home just outside Philadelphia killed at least two people, collapsed part of the building, sent fire shooting out and left people trapped inside, authorities said.

Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro said in a later news conference that emergency responders braved the flames, a heavy odor of gas and a second explosion to evacuate residents and employees.

Fire officials said they were in "rescue mode" five hours later, with responders still digging by hand and using search dogs, earth-moving equipment and sonar to locate potential victims.

The explosion happened at Bristol Health & Rehab Center in Bristol Township, just as a utility crew had

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been on site looking for a gas leak.

Shapiro said a finding that a gas leak caused the explosion was preliminary.

A plume of smoke rose from the nursing home as emergency responders from across the region rushed there.

Authorities did not identify those who died and did not immediately know the total number of people injured.

The town's fire chief, Kevin Dippolito, said at the Tuesday evening news conference that five people were still unaccounted for, but he cautioned that some may have left the scene with family members.

Shapiro asked his fellow Pennsylvanians to take a moment to pray "for this community, for those who are still missing, for those who are injured, and for those families who are about to celebrate Christmas with an empty chair at their table."

Dippolito described a chaotic rescue where firefighters found people stuck in stairwells and elevator shafts and pulled residents out of the fiery building through windows and doors. Two people were rescued from a collapsed section of building, he said.

Firefighters handed off patients to waiting police officers outside, including one "who literally threw two people over his shoulders," Dippolito said. "It was nothing short of extraordinary." A second explosion erupted during the rescue, he said.

Bucks County emergency management officials said they first received a report of an explosion at approximately 2:15 p.m.

Willie Tye, who lives about a block away, said he was sitting at home watching a basketball game on TV when he heard a "loud ka-boom."

"I thought an airplane or something came and fell on my house," Tye said.

He got up to go look and saw "fire everywhere" and people escaping the building. "Just got to keep praying for them," Tye said.

The local gas utility, PECO, said while its crews were responding to reports of a gas odor at the nursing home, an explosion happened.

"PECO crews shut off natural gas and electric service to the facility to ensure the safety of first responders and local residents. It is not known at this time if PECO's equipment, or natural gas, was involved in this incident," the utility said in a statement.

One worker sustained non-life-threatening injuries, the utility said.

Investigators from the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission's went to the scene. Finding that the explosion was caused by a gas leak won't be confirmed until the agency can examine the scene, a utility commission spokesperson said.

Musuline Watson, who said she was a certified nursing assistant at the facility, told WPVI-TV/ABC 6 that, over the weekend, she and others there smelled gas, but "there was no heat in the room, so we didn't take it to be anything."

The 174-bed nursing home is about 20 miles (32 kilometers) northeast of Philadelphia. It is newly affiliated with Saber Healthcare Group and had been known until recently as Silver Lake Healthcare Center.

In a statement, Saber called the explosion "devastating." It said facility personnel had promptly reported a gas smell to PECO before the explosion and that it was working with authorities to ensure the safety and well-being of staff, residents and the community.

The latest state inspection report for the facility was in October, and the Pennsylvania Department of Health found that it was not in compliance with several state regulations.

The inspection report said the facility failed to provide an accurate set of floor plans and properly maintain several stairways.

It said the facility failed to maintain portable fire extinguishers on one of the three levels and failed to provide the required "smoke barrier partitions," which are designed to contain smoke on two floors.

According to Medicare.gov, the facility underwent a standard fire safety inspection in September 2024, during which no citations were issued. Medicare's overall rating of the facility is listed as "much below

average," with poor ratings for health inspections in particular.

## Six dead and a family left reeling after Mexican Navy medical flight crashes in Texas

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH, FÉLIX MÁRQUEZ and MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

Air traffic controllers lost communication for about 10 minutes with a small Mexican Navy plane carrying a young medical patient and seven others before it crashed off the Texas coast in thick fog, killing at least six people, Mexico's government said Tuesday.

The plane was working with a nonprofit group transporting Mexican children with severe burns to a hospital in Galveston, near Houston, when the plane crashed Monday afternoon. Authorities believed the plane had landed, but the flight had lost contact with air controllers, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said Tuesday in her morning briefing.

Teams found the dead bodies of five people and pulled two survivors from the plane's wreckage, then set off on a daylong search in the waters near Galveston for 29-year-old Navy Lieutenant Luis Enrique Castillo. Castillo's family back in their rural town in southern Mexico were left scrambling for answers, hoping for the best for their missing son.

"We don't know what to do," his father Eduardo Castillo said Tuesday. "All we can do is wait. We can't go to the United States, we have no visa."

The search came to an end Tuesday night when search teams found Castillo's body. American authorities are investigating the cause, but the National Transportation Safety Board said Tuesday that it could take a week or more to recover the aircraft.

"What happened is very tragic," Sheinbaum said in her morning press briefing, noting that sailors were among the dead.

Plane was too low as it descended

As the twin turboprop Beech King Air 350i approached Sholes International Airport in Galveston, radar shows it was far too low, said Jeff Guzzetti, a former NTSB and Federal Aviation Administration crash investigator.

A navigation system for the runway where the plane was supposed to land had been out of service for about a week, Guzzetti said. The system sends signals to the airplane cockpit that helps pilots navigate in the kind of bad weather that had enveloped the area. The fog was so thick that meteorologists estimated only about a half-mile of visibility.

The pilot should have aborted the landing if the runway wasn't visible at an altitude of 205 feet (62.5 meters), climbing back up before trying again or looking for another airport entirely, Guzzetti said.

Guzzetti said the reported radar track shows that the pilot was descending rapidly below 200 feet (61 meters), a full 2 miles (3 kilometers) away from the runway.

"Maybe there was some sort of mechanical malfunction," he said. "But just looking at the recorded flight track and comparing it with the weather and the airport equipment outage, seems to me that this landing approach should never have occurred."

Witness describes crash scene

The plane crashed in a bay near the base of the causeway connecting Galveston Island to the mainland. The popular beach destination is about 50 miles (80 kilometers) southeast of Houston.

Sky Decker, a professional yacht captain who lives near the crash site, said he jumped in his boat to see if he could help. He picked up two police officers who guided him through the thick fog to the nearly submerged plane. Decker jumped into the water and found a badly injured woman trapped beneath chairs and other debris.

"She had maybe 3 inches (7.6 centimeters) of air gap to breathe in," he said. "And there was jet fuel in there mixed with the water, fumes real bad. She was really fighting for her life."

He said he also pulled out a man seated in front of her who had already died.

Family left reeling

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Eduardo Castillo gathered with the rest of his family and friends Tuesday afternoon in their small community of El Pantano in the sweltering southern Mexican state of Veracruz.

The father, who worked long hours as a carpenter to give his son the opportunities he never had, was desperately refreshing his phone every few minutes, looking for any news of their missing son. Mexico's Marines, he noted, had provided few other details than a call saying their son was missing.

Framed pictures of Luis Enrique Castillo and his many diplomas coated a wall of their home. He and his wife were expecting a baby due in three months.

On Tuesday night, Castillo heard his phone ring and answered, hearing the words he had dreaded. His son was dead.

"Now he's never going to meet his unborn child," Eduard Castillo said as his family hugged and sobbed around him.

Investigators dig into the cause

A spokesperson for the NTSB said in an email that investigators will review maintenance records, weather forecasts and air traffic control communications. A preliminary report is expected within 30 days.

Guzzetti said the investigation also will likely look into how serious the young patient's medical condition was and how motivated the pilot was to land.

"There have been previous accidents in the air medical community where pilots try to push their luck in order to save the patient," he said.

The aircraft had a "very, very proven design," said aviation safety expert John Cox. He said it's the latest version of a series that has been in use since the 1960s and would have been outfitted with all the modern electronics, avionics and equipment.

Plane was helping with medical mission

Mexico's Navy said the plane was helping with a medical mission in coordination with the Michou and Mau Foundation.

The charity was founded after a mother died trying to save her kids from a fire. One child died, while another survived after receiving treatment at Shriners Children's Texas in Galveston. Over 23 years, the foundation has helped transfer more than 2,000 patients to that hospital and other medical facilities with burn expertise, according to the charity's website.

In a social media post, the foundation offered condolences to the families of the crash victims.

Shriners Children's Texas said in a statement that it learned of the crash with "profound sadness" but wasn't able to provide any information about the child's condition.

Crash comes amid focus on aviation safety

This latest crash comes amid a year of intense scrutiny on aviation safety after a string of high-profile crashes and the flight disruptions during the government shutdown driven by the shortage of air traffic controllers.

The January midair collision between an Army helicopter and an airliner near Washington, D.C., was followed by the crash of a medical transport plane in Philadelphia. This fall's fiery UPS plane crash only added to the concerns. Still, the total number of crashes in 2025 was actually down a bit from last year, and experts say flying remains safe overall.

## California drivers warned to reconsider Christmas travel plans ahead of storms

By TRÂN NGUYỄN Associated Press

California officials and weather forecasters urged holiday travelers to avoid the roads on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day ahead of a series of powerful winter storms that threatened to slam the state with relentless rains, heavy winds and mountain snow through Friday.

Millions of people are expected to travel across the state. They will likely meet hazardous, if not impossible, traveling conditions as several atmospheric rivers were forecast to make their way through the state, the National Weather Service warned.

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"If you're planning to be on the roads for the Christmas holidays, please reconsider your plans," said Ariel Cohen, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Los Angeles.

Forecasters said Southern California could see its wettest Christmas in years and warned about flash flooding, mudslides and debris flows in areas burned by last January's wildfires. Los Angeles County officials said Tuesday they were knocking on the doors of some 380 particularly vulnerable households to order them to leave.

Most areas saw scattered showers Tuesday morning, and the system was expected to pick up in the evening and intensify into Christmas Eve. Some regions will see rain and winds taper off Wednesday before another storm moves in.

Much of the Sacramento Valley and the San Francisco Bay Area were under a flood watch and a high wind warning through Friday. Forecasters warned of heavy snow and gusts for parts of the Sierra Nevada starting Tuesday that will create "near white-out conditions" and make it "nearly impossible" to travel through the mountain passes.

There's also a risk of severe thunderstorms and a small chance of tornadoes along the northern coast.

Heavy rain and flash flooding that started Saturday in Northern California already led to water rescues and at least one death, local officials said. Shasta County Sheriff Michael L. Johnson on Monday declared a state of emergency to prepare for more rain and allow the state to help with hazard mitigation and search and rescue operations.

Southern California typically gets half an inch to 1 inch (1.3 to 2.5 centimeters) of rain this time of year, but this week many areas could see between 4 and 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters), National Weather Service meteorologist Mike Wofford said. It could be even more in the mountains. Gusts could reach 60 to 80 mph (96.5 to 127.8 kph) in parts of the central coast.

Potential widespread flooding, rockslides and mudslides are highly likely, especially in areas burned by last January's deadly Palisades fire, he added. Officials expect multiple road closures and airport delays during the storms. Downed trees and powerlines are also possible. Parts of Los Angeles were under evacuation warnings starting Tuesday.

The county had put up K-rails, a type of barrier, around the burn scar to help catch sliding debris during rainstorms. Residents could also pick up free sandbags to protect their homes, said Kathryn Barger, a Los Angeles County supervisor representing Altadena.

"When experts are projecting this type of rain in this short period of time, it's serious," Barger said.

Many people in burn scar areas decided not to leave after receiving the evacuation notification, Los Angeles Police Department Chief Jim McDonnell said Tuesday. He urged them to reconsider.

"The threat posed by this storm is real and imminent," he said.

Local and state officials are gearing up to respond to emergencies through the week. The state has deployed resources and first responders to a number of counties along the coast and in Southern California ahead of the storms. The California National Guard is also on standby to assist.

An atmospheric river is a long, narrow band of water vapor that forms over an ocean and flows through the sky, transporting moisture from the tropics to northern latitudes.

Earlier this month, stubborn atmospheric rivers drenched Washington state with nearly 5 trillion gallons (19 trillion liters) of rain in a week, threatening record flood levels, meteorologists said. That rainfall was supercharged by warm weather and air, plus unusual weather conditions tracing back as far as a tropical cyclone in Indonesia.

## Libya's military chief and 7 others are killed in a plane crash after takeoff from Turkey

By SUZAN FRASER and FAY ABUELGASIM Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — A private jet carrying Libya's military chief, four other officers and three crew members crashed on Tuesday after takeoff from Turkey's capital, Ankara, killing everyone on board. Libyan officials said the cause of the crash was a technical malfunction on the plane.

The Libyan delegation was in Ankara for high-level defense talks aimed at boosting military cooperation between the two countries, Turkish officials said.

Libyan Prime Minister Abdul-Hamid Dbeibah confirmed the death of Gen. Muhammad Ali Ahmad al-Haddad and the four officers, saying in a statement on Facebook that the "tragic accident" took place as the delegation was returning home. The prime minister called it a "great loss" for Libya.

Al-Haddad was the top military commander in western Libya and played a crucial role in the ongoing, U.N.-brokered efforts to unify Libya's military, which has split, much like Libya's institutions.

The four other officers who died in the crash were Gen. Al-Fitouri Ghraibil, the head of Libya's ground forces, Brig. Gen. Mahmoud Al-Qatawi, who led the military manufacturing authority, Mohammed Al-Asawi Diab, advisor to the chief of staff, and Mohammed Omar Ahmed Mahjoub, a military photographer with the chief of staff's office.

The identities of the three crew members were not immediately known.

Turkish officials said the wreckage of the Falcon 50 type business jet had been found near the village of Kesikkavak, in Haymana, a district some 70 kilometers (about 43.5 miles) south of Ankara.

Earlier on Tuesday evening, Turkey's air traffic controllers said they lost contact with the plane, which was en route back to Libya, after takeoff from Ankara's Esenboga airport.

Turkish Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya, said in a social media post that the plane took off at 8:30 p.m. and that contact was lost 40 minutes later. The plane issued an emergency landing signal near Haymana before all communication ceased, Yerlikaya said.

Burhanettin Duran, the head of Turkish presidential communications office, said the plane notified air traffic control of an electrical fault and requested an emergency landing. The aircraft was redirected back to Esenboga where preparations for its landing began.

The plane however, disappeared from the radar while descending for the emergency landing, Duran said.

Security camera footage aired on local television stations showed the night sky over Haymana suddenly lit up by what appeared to be an explosion.

While in Ankara, al-Haddad had met with Turkish Defense Minister Yasar Guler and other officials.

The airport in Ankara was temporarily closed and several flights were diverted to other locations. Turkey's Justice Ministry said four prosecutors have been assigned to investigate the crash, as is common in such incidents.

According to a government statement on Facebook, Libya will send a team to Ankara to work with Turkish authorities on investigating the crash.

Libya plunged into chaos after the country's 2011 uprising toppled and killed longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi. The country split, with rival administrations based in the east and west, backed by an array of rogue militias and foreign governments.

Turkey has been allied with Libya's government in the west, but has recently taken steps to improve ties with the eastern-based government as well.

Tuesday's visit by the Libyan delegation came a day after Turkey's parliament approved to extend the mandate of Turkish troops serving in Libya for two years. Turkey deployed troops following a 2019 security and military cooperation agreement that was reached between Ankara and the Tripoli-based government.

## **Medicaid paid more than \$207 million for dead people. A new law could help fix that**

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Medicaid programs made more than \$200 million in improper payments to health care providers between 2021 and 2022 for people who had already died, according to a new report from the independent watchdog for the Department of Health and Human Services.

But the department's Office of Inspector General said it expects a new provision in Republicans' One Big Beautiful Bill requiring states to audit their Medicaid beneficiary lists may help reduce these improper

payments in the future.

These kinds of improper payments are “not unique to one state, and the issue continues to be persistent,” Aner Sanchez, assistant regional inspector general in the Office of Audit Services told The Associated Press. Sanchez has been researching this issue for a decade.

The watchdog report released Tuesday said more than \$207.5 million in managed care payments were made on behalf of deceased enrollees between July 2021 to July 2022. The office recommends that the federal government share more information with state governments to recover the incorrect payments — including a Social Security database known as the Full Death Master File, which contains more than 142 million records going back to 1899.

Sharing the Full Death Master File data has been tightly restricted due to privacy laws which protect against identity theft and fraud.

The massive tax and spending bill that was signed into law by President Donald Trump this summer expands how the Full Death Master File can be used by mandating Medicaid agencies to quarterly audit their provider and beneficiary lists against the file, beginning in 2027. The intent is to stop payments to dead people and improve accuracy.

Tuesday’s report is the first nationwide look at improper Medicaid payments. Since 2016, HHS’ inspector general has conducted 18 audits on a selection of state programs and had identified that Medicaid agencies had improperly made managed care payments on behalf of deceased enrollees totaling approximately \$289 million.

The government had some success using the Full Death Master File to prevent improper payments earlier this year. In January, the Treasury Department reported that it had clawed back more than \$31 million in federal payments that improperly went to dead people as part of a five-month pilot program after Congress gave Treasury temporary access to the file for three years as part of the 2021 appropriations bill.

Meanwhile, the Social Security Administration has been making unusual updates to the file itself, adding and removing records, and complicating its use. For instance, the Trump administration in April moved to classify thousands of living immigrants as dead and cancel their Social Security numbers to crack down on immigrants who had been temporarily allowed to live in the U.S. under programs started during the Biden administration.

## **Voluminous new Epstein document release includes multiple Trump mentions, but little revelatory news**

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Justice Department has released tens of thousands more documents related to Jeffrey Epstein, a tranche that included multiple mentions of President Donald Trump but added little new revelatory information to the long-anticipated public file on the late financier and convicted sex offender.

The release is the most voluminous so far and comes after a massive public campaign for transparency into the U.S. government’s Epstein investigations.

Many of the mentions of Trump in the file came from news clippings, though it includes an email from a prosecutor pointing out the flights that Trump took on Epstein’s private jet during the 1990s.

The two men were friends for years before a falling out. Trump has not been accused of wrongdoing in connection with Epstein. The Justice Department issued a statement Tuesday that some documents contain “untrue and sensationalist claims” about Trump made shortly before the 2020 election — and said one document, purported to be a letter from Epstein to Larry Nassar, a sports doctor convicted of sexually abusing Olympic athletes, had been deemed fake.

Here are some takeaways:

Prosecutor flagged Trump’s travel on Epstein’s jet

Among the mentions of Trump in the latest batch of the Epstein files is a note from a federal prosecutor from January 2020 that said Trump had flown on the financier’s private plane more often than had been

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previously known.

An assistant U.S. attorney from the Southern District of New York said in an email that flight records the office received on Jan. 6, 2020, showed that Trump was on Epstein's jet "many more times than previously has been reported (or that we were aware)."

The prosecutor who flagged the Trump mentions in the flight logs said they did so because lawyers "didn't want any of this to be a surprise down the road."

His travels on Epstein's plane spanned the time that would likely be covered in any criminal charges against Epstein's co-conspirator, Ghislaine Maxwell. Trump was listed as a passenger on at least eight flights between 1993 and 1996, and on at least four of those flights, Maxwell was also there, according to the email.

On one of those eight flights, in 1993, Trump and Epstein were the only two passengers listed in the flight logs. On another flight, the three passengers listed in records are Epstein, Trump, and a redacted individual, who was 20 years old at the time. Two other flights included two women -- whose names were redacted in follow-up emails -- identified as potential witnesses in a Maxwell case.

Several additional Trump trips on Epstein's plane had been previously disclosed during Maxwell's criminal proceedings.

Asked for comment about the email, the White House pointed to a Justice Department statement saying Monday's release contained "unfounded and false" claims against the president submitted to the FBI shortly before the 2020 election, but they were nevertheless being released for full transparency.

Later Tuesday, the department said on social media that the FBI had confirmed the purported Nassar letter "is FAKE" based on the handwriting, Virginia postmark and return address, which did not include Epstein's jail or inmate number, both required for outgoing mail.

"This fake letter serves as a reminder that just because a document is released by the Department of Justice does not make the allegations or claims within the document factual," the department said in a post on X.

The latest release also showed that Mar-a-Lago, Trump's southern Florida club, was served with a subpoena in 2021 for its employment records. The disclosure came as part of an email chain in which lawyers for the Southern District of New York and an attorney in touch with representatives for the Trump Organization discussed the employment status of someone whose name was redacted.

Trump has called the files a distraction

Trump complained that the files were a distraction from the work he and other Republicans are doing for the country.

Speaking during an unrelated event at his Mar-a-Lago home in Palm Beach, Florida, on Monday, the president blamed Democrats and some Republicans for the controversy.

"What this whole thing is with Epstein is a way of trying to deflect from the tremendous success that the Republican Party has," Trump said.

He also expressed frustration about the famous people shown with Epstein in photos released by the Justice Department -- people who he said may not have known him but ended up in the shot anyway.

"You probably have pictures being exposed of other people that innocently met Jeffrey Epstein years ago, many years ago. And they're, you know, highly respected bankers and lawyers and others," Trump said.

Other high-profile people are showing up in the files

Well-known people shown in the files include former President Bill Clinton, the late pop star Michael Jackson and singer Diana Ross. The mere inclusion of someone's name or images in files from the investigation does not imply wrongdoing.

The latest release also includes files that put the U.K.'s former Prince Andrew back in the headlines.

Among those documents is correspondence between Maxwell and someone who signs off with the initial "A."

The email exchange includes other references that suggest Maxwell's correspondent may be Andrew. He did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The August 2001 email from someone identified only as "The Invisible Man," said he is "up here at Balmoral Summer Camp for the Royal Family," an apparent reference to the Scottish estate where the royal family has traditionally taken their late summer holidays.

"A" writes: "How's LA? Have you found me some new inappropriate friends?"

The writer says he has left "the RN" and refers to the challenges of looking after "the Girls." Andrew retired from the Royal Navy in 2001 and has two daughters.

Andrew, one of King Charles III's younger brothers, was stripped of the right to be called a prince and his other royal titles and honors in October, amid continued publicity about his links to Epstein and concerns about the potential damage to the rest of the royal family. He is now known as Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor.

Andrew has repeatedly denied committing any crimes, including having sex with Virginia Giuffre, who alleged that she was trafficked by Epstein and had sex with Andrew when she was 17.

The documents also reveal months of sometimes testy negotiations as U.S. federal prosecutors tried but ultimately failed to secure Mountbatten-Windsor's testimony. Talks foundered amid complaints that each side had made misleading statements to the press and a seeming inability to bridge the differences between the U.S. and British legal systems.

Biggest information dump yet

Trump tried for months to keep the records sealed before relenting to political pressure, including from some fellow Republicans, though he eventually signed a bill mandating the release of most of the Justice Department's files on Epstein.

Monday's overnight release was the biggest dump yet, including nearly 30,000 more pages.

It includes news clippings, varied tips to law enforcement and surveillance videos from the New York jail where Epstein was held before taking his own life in 2019. Much was already in the public domain.

The law called for the files to be released within 30 days, but the Justice Department has instead released them in stages starting Friday. Officials have said they're going slowly to protect victims, though some women assaulted by Epstein have spoken out publicly to call for greater transparency.

And the administration is facing fierce accusations that it is withholding too much information. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said the tens of thousands of files released still left "more questions than answers." He pointed to a 2019 FBI email that mentions 10 people under investigation as possible co-conspirators but contains few additional details.

## **S&P 500 closes at another record, beating the high it set earlier this month**

By DAMIAN J. TROISE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Stocks closed at another record on Wall Street Tuesday following a surprisingly strong report on economic growth over the summer.

The U.S. government's first assessment of economic growth during the third quarter also showed that inflation remains high. A separate report showed that consumer confidence continued fading in December. All of it added to a complicated picture of the economy.

The latest record for the S&P 500 came even as most stocks within the benchmark index lost ground. Technology stocks, which have been the main force pushing major indexes to records all year, once again were able to counter weakness elsewhere in the market.

The S&P 500 rose 31.30 points, or 0.5%, to 6,909.79, surpassing the record set earlier in December. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 79.73 points, or 0.2%, to 48,442.41. The Nasdaq composite rose 133.02 points, or 0.6%, to 23,561.84.

Nvidia jumped 3% and was the biggest force helping to push the market higher. It is among several big tech companies with outsized valuations that tend to have more impact on the broader market's direction. Google's parent company, Alphabet, rose 1.5%.

Novo Nordisk jumped 7.3% after U.S. regulators approved a pill version of the blockbuster weight-loss drug Wegovy, the first daily oral medication to treat obesity.

Wall Street received the latest economic updates during an otherwise quiet holiday-shortened week. Markets in the U.S. will close early Wednesday for Christmas Eve and remain closed for Christmas on Thursday.

The U.S. economy grew at a 4.3% annual rate during the third quarter. That builds on 3.8% growth during the second quarter and marks a sharp turnaround from the first quarter, when the U.S. economy shrank for the first time in three years.

The latest report also showed that stubborn inflation continues to hover over the economy. The Federal Reserve's favored inflation gauge — called the personal consumption expenditures index, or PCE — climbed to a 2.8% annual pace last quarter, up from 2.1% in the second quarter.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 4.16% from 4.15% just before the report on gross domestic product for the third quarter was released. The yield on the two-year Treasury, which more closely tracks expectations for Fed actions, rose to 3.53% from 3.49% just prior to the report's release.

The Fed has been taking a more cautious policy approach amid mixed signals from the economy. Economic growth has been occurring at the same time that inflation remains stubbornly above the central bank's 2% target. The job market is also slowing, adding another layer of concern to whether the central bank should continue cutting interest rates.

On Wednesday, the Labor Department will release its weekly data on applications for jobless benefits, which stands as a proxy for U.S. layoffs.

"The Fed has been balancing off inflation risks versus weakening labor markets and today's report further complicates their dilemma," wrote Dominic Pappalardo, chief multi-asset strategist at Morningstar Wealth, in a note to investors.

The Fed has cut interest rates three times in 2025 and the central bank's rate-setting committee is divided about additional rate cuts in 2026. The committee members, at their last meeting, projected a wide range of possibilities from holding rates steady to two or more reductions.

Wall Street expects the Fed to hold rates steady at its upcoming meeting in January.

Consumer spending and confidence has been shaky amid worries about high prices, especially with a wide-ranging U.S. trade war that could drive prices for many goods even higher.

The latest update from business group The Conference Board showed that consumer confidence fell in December to its lowest level since tariffs were rolled out in April. Meanwhile, retail sales have been weakening, with consumers growing more cautious.

Consumers have become more targeted in their buying during the holiday shopping season, according to Visa's Consulting and Analytics division. From Nov. 1 through Sunday, cash and credit card sales rose 4.2%, which is less than the 4.8% increase during the same period a year ago.

Markets were mixed in Asia and Europe.

The price of gold continued rising. It rose 0.8% to \$4,505.70 per ounce Tuesday and is up about 70% for the year.

Oil prices were relatively stable after jumping a day prior. U.S. benchmark crude rose 0.6% to \$58.38 per barrel. The price of Brent crude, the international standard, rose 0.5% to \$62.38 a barrel.

## Former Nebraska US Sen. Ben Sasse reveals advanced pancreatic cancer diagnosis

By The Associated Press undefined

Former Nebraska U.S. Sen. Ben Sasse, a conservative who rebuked political tribalism and stood out as a longtime critic of President Donald Trump, announced Tuesday he was diagnosed with advanced pancreatic cancer.

Sasse, 53, made the announcement on social media, saying he learned of the disease last week and is "now marching to the beat of a faster drummer."

"This is a tough note to write, but since a bunch of you have started to suspect something, I'll cut to the chase," Sasse wrote. "Last week I was diagnosed with metastasized, stage-four pancreatic cancer,

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and am gonna die.”

Sasse was first elected to the Senate in 2014. He comfortably won reelection in 2020 after fending off a pro-Trump primary challenger. Sasse drew the ire of GOP activists for his vocal criticism of Trump’s character and policies, including questioning his moral values and saying he cozied up to adversarial foreign leaders.

Sasse was one of seven Republican senators to vote to convict the former president of “incitement of insurrection” after the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol. After threats of a public censure back home, he extended his critique to party loyalists who blindly worship one man and rejected him for his refusal to bend the knee.

He resigned from the Senate in 2023 to serve as the 13th president of the University of Florida after a contentious approval process. He left that post the following year after his wife was diagnosed with epilepsy.

Sasse, who has degrees from Harvard, St. John’s College and Yale, worked as an assistant secretary of Health and Human Services under President George W. Bush. He served as president of Midland University, a small Christian university in eastern Nebraska, before he ran for the Senate.

Sasse and his wife have three children.

“I’m not going down without a fight. One sub-part of God’s grace is found in the jawdropping advances science has made the past few years in immunotherapy and more,” Sasse wrote. “Death and dying aren’t the same — the process of dying is still something to be lived.”

## A look at aging baby boomers in the United States

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

The oldest baby boomers — once the vanguard of an American youth that revolutionized U.S. culture and politics — turn 80 in 2026.

The generation that twirled the first plastic hula hoops and dressed up the first Barbie dolls, embraced the TV age, blissed out at Woodstock and protested and fought in the Vietnam War — the cohort that didn’t trust anyone over age 30 — now is contributing to the overall aging of America.

Boomers becoming octogenarians in 2026 include actor Henry Winkler and baseball Hall of Famer Reggie Jackson, singers Cher and Dolly Parton and presidents Donald Trump, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton.

### The aging and shrinking youth of America

America’s population swelled with around 76 million births from 1946 to 1964, a spike magnified by couples reuniting after World War Two and enjoying postwar prosperity.

Boomers were better educated and richer than previous generations, and they helped grow a consumer-driven economy. In their youth, they pushed for social change through the Civil Rights Movement, the women’s rights movement and efforts to end the Vietnam War.

“We had rock ‘n’ roll. We were the first generation to get out and demonstrate in the streets. We were the first generation, that was, you know, a socially conscious generation,” said Diane West, a metro Atlanta resident who turns 80 in January. “Our parents played by the rules. We didn’t necessarily play by the rules, and there were lots of us.”

As they got older they became known as the “me” generation, a pejorative term coined by writer Tom Wolfe to reflect what some regarded as their self-absorption and consumerism.

“The thing about baby boomers is they’ve always had a spotlight on them, no matter what age they were,” Brookings demographer William Frey said. “They were a big generation, but they also did important things.”

By the end of this decade, all baby boomers will be 65 and older, and the number of people 80 and over will double in 20 years, Frey said.

The share of senior citizens in the U.S. population is projected to grow from 18.7% in 2025 to nearly 23% by 2050, while children under 18 decline from almost 21% to a projected 18.4%.

Without any immigration, the U.S. population will start shrinking in five years. That’s when deaths will surpass births, according to projections from the Congressional Budget Office, which were revised in

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September to account for the Trump administration's immigration crackdown. Population growth comes from immigration as well as births outpacing deaths.

The aging of America is being compounded by longer lives due to better health care and lower birth rates.

The projected average U.S. life expectancy at birth rises from 78.9 years in 2025 to 82.2 years in 2055, according to the CBO. And since the Great Recession in 2008, when the fertility rate was 2.08, around the 2.1 rate needed for children to numerically replace their parents, it has been on a steady decline, hitting 1.6 in 2025.

## Younger generations miss boomer milestones

Women are having fewer children because they are better educated, they're delaying marriage to focus on careers and they're having their first child at a later age. Unaffordable housing, poor access to child care and the growing expenses of child-rearing also add up to fewer kids.

University of New Hampshire senior demographer Kenneth Johnson estimates that the result has been 11.8 million fewer births, compared to what might have been had the fertility rate stayed at Great Recession levels.

"I was young when I had kids. I mean that's what we did — we got out of college, we got married and we had babies," said West, who has two daughters, a stepdaughter and six grandchildren. "My kids got married in their 30s, so it's very different."

A recent Census Bureau study showed that 21st century young adults in the U.S. haven't been adulting like baby boomers did. In 1975, almost half of 25-to-34-year-olds had moved out of their parents' home, landed jobs, gotten married and had kids. By the early 2020s, less than a quarter of U.S. adults had hit these milestones.

West, whose 21-year-old grandson lives with her, understands why: They lack the prospects her generation enjoyed. Her grandson, Paul Quirk, said it comes down to financial instability.

"They were able to buy a lot of things, a lot cheaper," Quirk said.

All of her grandchildren are frustrated by the economy, West added.

"You have to get three roommates in order to afford a place," she said. "When we got out of college, we had a job waiting for us. And now, people who have master's degrees are going to work fast food while they look for a real job."

## Implications for the economy

The aging of America could constrain economic growth. With fewer workers paying taxes, Social Security and Medicare will be under more pressure. About 34 seniors have been supported by every 100 workers in 2025, but that ratio grows to 50 seniors per 100 working-age people in about 30 years, according to estimates released last year by the White House.

When West launched her career in employee benefits and retirement planning in 1973, each 100 workers supported 20 or fewer retirees, by some calculations.

Vice President JD Vance and Tesla CEO Elon Musk are among those pushing for an increase in fertility. Vance has suggested giving parents more voting power, according to their numbers of children, or following the example of Hungary's Viktor Orbán in giving low-interest loans to married parents and tax exemptions to women who have four children or more.

Frey said programs that incentivize fertility among U.S. women hardly ever work, so funding should support pre-kindergarten and paid family leave.

"I think the best you can do for people who do want to have kids is to make it easier and less expensive to have them and raise them," he said. "Those things may not bring up the fertility rate as much as people would like, but at least the kids who are being born will have a better chance of succeeding."

## US drivers are seeing lower gas prices this holiday season

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

This holiday season, many U.S. drivers are getting the gift of lower gas prices.

According to data from motor club AAA, December has been the cheapest month for prices at the pump

this year. The national average for unleaded gasoline has stayed below the \$3 mark since Dec. 2, falling to its lowest level of about \$2.85 a gallon on Monday.

That figure has inched up slightly since, sitting at closer to \$2.86 a gallon Tuesday — but overall, consumers hitting the road ahead of the Christmas holiday will likely continue to see mild prices.

As always, some states have cheaper averages than others, due to factors ranging from nearby refinery supply to local fuel requirements. Hawaii had the highest average of about \$4.44 a gallon on Tuesday, per AAA — followed by \$4.30 in California and \$3.92 in Washington. Meanwhile, Oklahoma had the lowest average at about \$2.30 per gallon, followed by nearly \$2.42 in both Arkansas and Iowa.

Still, nationwide, unleaded gasoline is down more than 18 cents than it was at this time last year, and 21 cents from a month ago. So far, AAA says that prices seen this month mark the cheapest December for gas prices since 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic roiled the economy.

The travel organization notes that this month's cheaper prices arrive as supply remains strong. Crude oil, the main ingredient in gasoline, has also been at a relatively mild level — with West Texas Intermediate remaining below the \$60 per barrel mark for most of December.

Relief at the pump is welcome for consumers who have been feeling higher prices in other parts of their budgets — as worries about the costs of goods ranging from groceries to holiday gifts rise amid ongoing inflation and U.S. President Donald Trump's tariffs on foreign imports.

Government data actually showed that consumer prices cooled in November, rising at just 2.7% from a year earlier. But year-over-year inflation still remains well above the Federal Reserve's 2% target — and economists quickly warned that last month's numbers were suspect because of delays and possible distortions from the 43-day federal shutdown.

Most Americans have continued to express anger and frustration about the high cost of living — as well as an uncertain job market. On Tuesday, the Conference Board said that its consumer confidence index fell in December to its lowest level since April.

## **Camp Mystic's reopening plans in Texas has drawn outrage, but some families want to return**

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

Patrick Hotze's three daughters made it home safe from Camp Mystic after July's catastrophic floods that killed 25 campers and two teenage counselors. He attended some of the funerals and says he understands the outrage over the Texas camp's plan to partially reopen next year.

He also intends to send his girls back.

"My heart is broken for them," Hotze said of the parents whose girls died, including some he described as close friends. "I think it's different for each kid and each family."

For the first time since the roaring flood, the 100-year-old all-girls Christian sleepaway retreat plans to sign up campers in January, forging ahead with a reopening that has divided families and stunned some lawmakers. Campers will start arriving in May, bunking on higher ground than the area where fast-rising waters on the Guadalupe River swept away two cabins.

Some families say the decision to let their daughters return is a vital step in their own healing from the disaster that is still under scrutiny. The floodwaters that worsened with terrifying quickness during the July Fourth holiday weekend killed at least 117 people in Kerr County alone. Two victims have still not been found, including an 8-year-old Camp Mystic camper.

Promises of extra safety and preventive measures

Next year, Texas legislators are set to hold investigative hearings into the tragedy but have shown little appetite to assign blame. Local leaders in Kerr County, including two who were asleep when the waters started rising, remain in their jobs after defending their preparations and evacuation efforts. They are now steering a slow recovery while trying to expedite a new flood warning system before campers return.

"We recognize that returning to Camp Mystic carries both hope and heartache," Camp Mystic's owners wrote in a letter to families this month. "For many of your daughters, this return is not simple, but it is a

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courageous step in their healing journey.”

It is unclear how many girls will return to Camp Mystic when the camp begins enrollment next month, but a spokesperson said there is “strong interest.” The camp’s owner, Dick Eastland, died in the flood and his family has vowed to enhance safety measures before reopening, including two-way radios in every cabin and new flood warning river monitors.

The devastating July floods were hardly the first to strike the area known as “Flash Flood Alley,” where the limestone hills quickly gather water and funnel it into narrow river banks. This year was at least the fifth time in a century that flooding near the Guadalupe River has turned deadly. An attorney for Camp Mystic, Mikal Watts, said he and camp officials have contacted several former campers who witnessed previous floods and who told them they were nowhere near as high or as powerful as the flooding this year.

## Outrage and acceptance

Those assurances have not quieted some parents of the 27 victims, who say the decision to reopen is insensitive and that the Eastland family has refused to take responsibility for its failures.

Lawsuits filed by some of the families allege camp operators failed to protect the children and even ordered girls and counselors in the cabins closest to the river to stay inside as floodwaters overwhelmed the property. Hundreds of 911 calls released by authorities this month included a woman who lived a mile downriver and said two of the campers had swept by.

“As parents of children who were killed at Camp Mystic last summer, we are deeply hurt but, sadly, not shocked by yet another insensitive announcement from Camp Mystic focused on enrollment,” the parents of six girls who died said in a public statement this month.

Some parents say Camp Mystic has played an instrumental role in their children’s personal and spiritual development, and that eased their decision to allow their girls to return.

Liberty Lindley’s 9-year-old daughter, Evie, was among those caught in the flooding. She was trapped with her campmates in a cabin dubbed Wiggle Inn, adjacent to the low-lying cabins that were quickly inundated by the flooded river.

Many of the girls Evie knew were swept to their deaths.

Yet despite the horror Evie endured, floating on mattresses with her friends in the pitch dark before being evacuated by helicopter, Lindley said her daughter didn’t hesitate when asked if she wanted to return to Camp Mystic.

“I know some people don’t understand that or think that’s crazy,” she said of her decision to allow her daughter to go back.

She recalled talking with Evie — whose twin sister died of leukemia in 2024 — while washing her hair in the bathtub, right after her terrifying ordeal.

“She thought she was going to be seeing her sister that night in heaven,” Lindley recalled. “And she still looked at me with a smile and said, ‘Mom, I really hope next year at camp we do Mary Poppins again, because I still really want to be Bert.’ That is just hours after the fact.”

## Some parents remain unsure

Still, not all parents are eager to send their daughters back to Camp Mystic.

John Ball, an attorney in McAllen, Texas, whose daughter was at Camp Mystic during the flood, said he has serious reservations, especially after the poor communication from camp officials about his daughter’s whereabouts.

Ball said he was out of town and didn’t learn that his daughter was safe until more than 12 hours after the flooding, when she was able to borrow a cellphone and call him.

“That was the hardest part, not knowing,” Ball said.

“I think we’re going to take this year off and see how it goes and what these changes look like that they’re implementing,” he said, “and we’ll go from there.”

## Resilient US consumers drive strongest economic expansion in 2 years

By MATT OTT AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. economy grew at a surprisingly strong 4.3% annual rate in the third quarter, the most rapid expansion in two years, driven by consumers who continue to spend in the face of ongoing inflation.

U.S. gross domestic product from July through September — the economy's total output of goods and services — rose from its 3.8% growth rate in the April-June quarter, the Commerce Department said Tuesday in a report delayed by the government shutdown. Economists surveyed by the data firm FactSet forecast growth of just 3% in the period.

As has been the case for most of this year, the consumer is providing the fuel that is powering the U.S. economy. Consumer spending, which accounts for about 70% of U.S. economic activity, rose to a 3.5% annual pace last quarter. That's up from 2.5% in the April-June period.

A number of economists, however, believe the growth spurt may be short-lived with the extended government shutdown dragging on the economy in the fourth quarter, as well as a growing number of Americans fatigued by stubbornly high inflation.

A survey published by the Conference Board Tuesday showed that consumer confidence slumped close to levels not seen since the U.S. rolled out broad tariffs on its trading partners in April.

"The jump in consumer spending reminds me a lot of last year's (fourth quarter)," said Stephen Stanley, chief U.S. economist at Santander. "Consumers were stretching. So, as was the case entering this year, households probably need to take a breather soon."

The seemingly divergent paths between how consumers say they are feeling and how much money continues to be spent may be more evidence of what is known as a "K-shaped economy." In that situation, the income of wealthier Americans is on the rise, due to stock market gains and growing investments, while lower-income households struggle with stagnant pay and higher prices.

"The latest data on household spending indicates continued strong gains in consumer spending, particularly on services," wrote Michael Pearce, chief U.S. economist for Oxford Economics. "We think that reflects the K-shaped consumer recovery, with spending growth driven by older, wealthier households while those on low and more moderate incomes struggle."

Tuesday's GDP report also showed that inflation remains higher than the Federal Reserve would like. The Fed's favored inflation gauge — called the personal consumption expenditures index, or PCE — climbed to a 2.8% annual pace last quarter, up from 2.1% in the second quarter.

Excluding volatile food and energy prices, so-called core PCE inflation was 2.9%, up from 2.6% in the April-June quarter.

Economists say that persistent and potentially worsening inflation could make a January interest rate cut from the Fed less likely, even as central bank officials remain concerned about a slowing labor market.

"If the economy keeps producing at this level, then there isn't as much need to worry about a slowing economy," said Chris Zaccarelli, chief investment officer for Northlight Asset Management, adding that inflation could return as the greatest threat to the economy.

Another consistent driver in the U.S. economy, spending on artificial intelligence, was also evident in the latest data.

Investment in intellectual property, the category that covers AI, grew 5.4% in the third quarter, following an even bigger jump of 15% in the second quarter. That figure was 6.5% in the first quarter.

Consumption and investment by the government grew by 2.2% in the quarter after contracting 0.1% in the second quarter. The third quarter figure was boosted by increased expenditures at the state and local levels and federal government defense spending.

Private business investment fell 0.3%, led by declines in investment in housing and in nonresidential buildings such as offices and warehouses. However, that decline was much less than the 13.8% slide in the second quarter.

Within the GDP data, a category that measures the economy's underlying strength grew at a 3% annual rate from July through September, up slightly from 2.9% in the second quarter. This category includes consumer spending and private investment, but excludes volatile items like exports, inventories and government spending.

Exports grew at an 8.8% rate, while imports, which subtract from GDP, fell another 4.7%.

Tuesday's report is the first of three estimates the government will make of GDP growth for the third quarter of the year.

Outside of the first quarter, when the economy shrank for the first time in three years as companies rushed to import goods ahead of President Donald Trump's tariff rollout, the U.S. economy has continued to expand at a healthy rate. That's despite much higher borrowing rates the Fed imposed in 2022 and 2023 in its drive to curb the inflation that surged as the United States bounced back with unexpected strength from the brief but devastating COVID-19 recession of 2020.

Though inflation remains above the Fed's 2% target, the central bank cut its benchmark lending rate three times in a row to close out 2025, mostly out of concern for a job market that has steadily lost momentum since spring.

Last week, the government reported that the U.S. economy gained a healthy 64,000 jobs in November but lost 105,000 in October. Notably, the unemployment rate rose to 4.6% last month, the highest since 2021.

The country's labor market has been stuck in a "low hire, low fire" state, economists say, as businesses stand pat due to uncertainty over Trump's tariffs and the lingering effects of elevated interest rates. Since March, job creation has fallen to an average 35,000 a month, compared to 71,000 in the year ended in March. Fed Chair Jerome Powell has said that he suspects those numbers will be revised even lower.

## Consumer confidence slumps to lowest level since the US rolled out tariffs in April

By MATT OTT AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Consumers' confidence in the economy was shaken in December as Americans grew anxious about high prices and the impact of President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs.

The Conference Board said Tuesday that its consumer confidence index fell 3.8 points to 89.1 in December, the fifth straight monthly decline and approaching the 85.7 reading from April, when Trump rolled out his import taxes on U.S. trading partners. November's reading was upwardly revised to 92.9.

A measure of Americans' short-term expectations for their income, business conditions and the job market remained stable at 70.7, but still well below 80, the marker that can signal a recession ahead. It was the 11th consecutive month that reading has come in under 80.

Consumers' assessments of their current economic situation tumbled 9.5 points to 116.8.

Write-in responses to the survey showed that prices and inflation remained consumers' biggest concern, along with tariffs, despite repeated claims by President Trump that inflation is a hoax.

Perceptions of the job market also declined this month.

The conference board's survey reported that 26.7% of consumers said jobs were "plentiful," down from 28.2% in November. Also, 20.8% of consumers said jobs were "hard to get," up from 20.1% last month.

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The country's labor market has been stuck in a "low hire, low fire" state, economists say, as businesses stand pat due to uncertainty over Trump's tariffs and the lingering effects of elevated interest rates. Since March, job creation has fallen to an average 35,000 a month, compared to 71,000 in the year ended in March. Fed Chair Jerome Powell said recently that he suspects those numbers will be revised even lower.

Despite the broad pessimism, the proportion of those surveyed who think a recession in the next year is unlikely grew.

The December survey showed that respondents' views of their family's current financial situation sank into negative territory for the first time in close to four years. On the flip side, expectations about their future financial situation were the most positive since January.

Also Tuesday, the government reported that the economy expanded at a 4.3% annual rate in the third quarter, though economists expect a much more sluggish fourth quarter due to the government shutdown and a potential pullback in consumer spending.

## Ukraine's own 'Dancing with the Stars' is back on for a special episode with wartime heroes

By SAMYA KULLAB and VASILISA STEPANENKO Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Before the war, Ukraine's own "Dancing with the Stars" was a cherished and popular television show, dazzling the audiences with performances by celebrities and professional dancers. The show is now back on for one special episode — this time with Ukrainian wartime heroes as the stars, underscoring the nation's resilience in difficult times.

Many still remember how President Volodymyr Zelenskyy — then an actor — won the dance competition in 2006, the year that "Tantsi z zirkamy" as the show is known in Ukrainian, first debuted.

In the new, special episode, the dancers perform with prosthetic limbs, showcasing their strength in overcoming adversity. The lineup of participants includes public figures who rose to prominence since Russia's full-out war on Ukraine was launched in February 2022.

But like all of present-day Ukraine, the show — which is part of an international franchise — has had to deal with a multitude of wartime challenges, including frequent power outages.

All the proceeds will go to the Superhumans Center, a specialist clinic for the treatment and rehabilitation of war-wounded victims.

A new reality

During a prerecording last week, dancers spun, leapt and glided under the sparkle of lights, some seamlessly integrating their prosthetic limbs into the choreography.

For creative producer Volodymyr Zavadiuk, every segment of the show is precious, creating something special during tough times.

"It's about our resilience and it's about our future," said Zavadiuk, who also heads Big Brave Events and the Big Entertainment Shows department at 1+1 Media.

Among the performers was Ruslana Danilkina, a war veteran who lost her leg in combat in 2022 and is now renowned in Ukraine for dedicating herself to helping injured troops adapt to life with prosthetics.

She delivered a passionate performance centered on reclaiming her womanhood following the traumatic injury.

Also back in the show is beloved dancer Dmytro Dikusar, this time as a competition judge. He juggled filming and serving with his platoon on the front lines.

Ukrainian rock musician Yevhen Halych sat in the makeup chair ahead of his number, reflecting on his own determination to bring back the show.

"We are filming this project in a country where there is a war. ... We have power cuts, we may have an air alert, it could be bombing," he said. "What do I feel? I feel a genuine desire to live a full life, no matter what happens."

Wartime challenges

Producing the show's special episode has been no easy feat in time of war. A live broadcast was impossible — a Russian attack can happen at any time. Then there were the technical obstacles: during last week's recording, a key generator malfunctioned.

When the show airs on Sunday, audiences will vote for their favorite.

Danilkina, who was only 18 years old when she lost her leg and who today works at the Superhumans Center, enthralled everyone with her passionate performance, her prosthetic limb artfully integrated into

her routine.

"Our dance number is about life. It's about accepting love," she told The Associated Press after her performance. "Because in reality, when your body is wounded, it's very difficult to love yourself. And allowing someone else to love you is even harder."

Her injury was not the end of her life, she said, and now she wants to show "thousands of wounded boys and girls who are starting their lives over again" that it's not the end of theirs.

For veteran Ivan Voinov and his wife of three months, Solomiia, the show was more than just a dance performance: it was the second time they had danced together since his injury, the first time was at their wedding.

Solomiia Voinov smiled shyly, recounting how she had long tried to persuade Ivan that they should dance until he gave in.

"We don't take our eyes off each other while dancing, and it's a great connection," she said. "I'm happy."

Voinov said he was already planning their next dance — a bachata, a fast-paced, hip-swaying style of dance that originated in the Dominican Republic.

"We will be able to continue dancing," he said. "It means that there is a future."

## Major Russian drone and missile attack on Ukraine kills at least 3 people and cuts power

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia fired more than 650 drones and three dozen missiles at Ukraine in a large-scale attack that began during the night and stretched into daylight hours Tuesday, officials said. At least three people were killed, including a 4-year-old child, two days before Christmas.

The barrage struck homes and the power grid in 13 regions of Ukraine, causing widespread outages in bitter temperatures, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, a day after he described recent progress on finding a peace deal as "quite solid."

The bombardment demonstrated Russian President Vladimir Putin's intention of pursuing the invasion of Ukraine, Zelenskyy said in a post on the Telegram messaging app. Ukrainian and European officials have complained that Putin is not sincerely engaging with U.S.-led peace efforts.

The attack "is an extremely clear signal of Russian priorities," Zelenskyy said. "A strike before Christmas, when people want to be with their families, at home, in safety. A strike, in fact, in the midst of negotiations that are being conducted to end this war. Putin cannot accept the fact that we must stop killing."

U.S. President Donald Trump has for months been pressing for a peace agreement, but the negotiations have become entangled in the very different demands from Moscow and Kyiv.

U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff said Sunday he held "productive and constructive" talks in Florida with Ukrainian and European representatives. Trump was less effusive Monday, saying, "The talks are going along."

Initial reports from Ukrainian emergency services said the child died in Ukraine's northwestern Zhytomyr region, while a drone killed a woman in the Kyiv region, and another civilian death was recorded in the western Khmelnytskyi region, according to Zelenskyy.

Russia launched 635 drones of various types and 38 missiles, Ukraine's air force said. Air defenses stopped 587 drones and 34 missiles, it said.

It was the ninth large-scale Russian attack on Ukraine's energy system this year and left multiple regions in the west without power, while emergency power outages were in place across the country, acting Energy Minister Artem Nekraso said. Work to restore power would begin as soon as the security situation permitted, he said.

Ukraine's largest private energy supplier, DTEK, said the attack targeted thermal power stations in what it said was the seventh major strike on the company's facilities since October.

DTEK's thermal power plants have been hit more than 220 times since Russia's full-scale invasion began in February 2022. Those attacks have killed four workers and wounded 59.

Authorities in the western regions of Rivne, Ternopil and Lviv, as well as the northern Sumy region, re-

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ported damage to energy infrastructure or power outages after the attack.

In the southern Odesa region, Russia struck energy, port, transport, industrial and residential infrastructure, according to regional head Oleh Kiper.

A merchant ship and over 120 homes were damaged, he said.

## Today in History: December 24, World War I 'Christmas truce' begins

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, Dec. 24, the 358th day of 2025. There are seven days left in the year. This is Christmas Eve.

Today in history:

On Dec. 24, 1914, during World War I, impromptu Christmas truces began to take hold along parts of the Western Front, principally between British and German soldiers but also involving French troops.

Also on this date:

In 1814, the United States and Britain signed the Treaty of Ghent, which would end the War of 1812 following ratification by both the British Parliament and the U.S. Senate.

In 1851, fire devastated the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., destroying about 35,000 volumes (about two-thirds of the library's collection).

In 1865, several veterans of the Confederate Army formed a private social club in Pulaski, Tennessee, that was the original version of the Ku Klux Klan.

In 1913, 73 people, most of them children, died in a crush of panic after a false cry of "Fire!" during a Christmas party for striking miners and their families at the Italian Hall in Calumet, Michigan.

In 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower supreme commander of Allied forces in Europe.

In 1992, President George H.W. Bush pardoned former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and five others in the Iran-Contra scandal.

In 2013, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II granted a posthumous pardon to code-breaker Alan Turing, who was criminally convicted of homosexual behavior in the 1950s.

In 2018, a series of explosions ripped through fireworks workshops in Tultepec, a town just north of Mexico City, leaving at least 24 people dead and dozens injured.

In 2024, NASA's Parker Solar Probe survived its record-breaking closest approach to the sun, hurtling 3.8 million miles above its fiery surface. Since its 2018 launch, the probe has completed numerous other close fly-bys to observe solar wind and other events.

Today's Birthdays: Immunologist Dr. Anthony Fauci is 85. Filmmaker Lee Daniels is 66. Basketball Hall of Fame coach Jay Wright is 64. Singer Ricky Martin is 54. Novelist and film producer Stephenie Meyer is 52. TV host Ryan Seacrest is 51. Rock singer Louis Tomlinson (One Direction) is 34. NFL wide receiver Davante Adams is 33.