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SD Freedom Caucus calls for accountability amid Governor Rhoden's grant spending spree

PIERRE, S.D. — The South Dakota Freedom Caucus is raising serious concerns about Governor Larry Rhoden's recent wave of executive grant disbursements totaling over \$2.6 million, awarded just weeks before the 2026 election cycle heats up.

These grants are funded through the Future Fund — a tax collected from every South Dakota business. That money is then handed out at the Governor's discretion. This isn't just government picking winners and losers — it's adding to the financial burden already crushing small businesses across our state.

Governor Rhoden has personally traveled the state distributing taxpayer-funded grants — including \$1,000,000 to Aberdeen for business park development, \$900,000 in operating support for Dakota Bio-Worx, \$500,000 for Watertown industrial park infrastructure, and \$200,000 for the "Keep Farmers Farming" program — all announced in December 2025.

The Freedom Caucus questions whether the timing and presentation of these taxpayer-funded "economic development" awards prioritize political visibility over transparent, accountable governance. When a sitting governor personally hits the road to hand out millions in taxpayer funds outside the legislative appropriations process, South Dakotans deserve to know: Is this economic policy — or campaign strategy?

"Taxpayers deserve to know exactly where their money is going — and why," said Representative Phil Jensen, Chair of the South Dakota Freedom Caucus. "When millions of dollars flow out of the executive branch with minimal legislative oversight, accountability suffers. This isn't about party — it's about protecting the people's money from becoming a political tool."

"No governor — regardless of party — should have unilateral control over millions in taxpayer-funded spending outside the appropriations process," added Representative Tina Mulally, Treasurer of the South Dakota Freedom Caucus. "The Legislature exists to provide oversight and ensure taxpayer dollars serve the public interest, not political convenience."

The South Dakota Freedom Caucus calls on this tax-on-businesses Future Fund to be reduced and removed, as the legislature was only two votes shy of passing bill HB 1186, which would have eliminated the Future Fund, early in the 2025 legislative. We call for the Governor's office to suspend cash giveaways while campaigning and to provide full transparency regarding the criteria, selection process, and timing of these grant awards. South Dakota families, farmers, and small business owners deserve leaders who prioritize accountability over optics. We call on Governor Rhoden to be that leader.

About South Dakota Freedom Caucus

South Dakota Freedom Caucus is founded by elected officials who believe in freedom and liberty for the people of South Dakota. We are the voice of citizens who want bold action to protect life, strengthen families, defend our constitutional rights, limit government, and revitalize personal and economic freedoms in the state of South Dakota.

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Call/Text Tina at 605/397-7285

for details



Annual Membership Rates

Student is \$29.82 per month or \$255.60 per year
Single is \$35.15 per month or \$319.50 per year
2-Person is \$55.45 per month or \$575.10 per year
Family is \$67.10 per month or \$702.26 per year

Month-to-Month Rates

Student is \$35.15 per month
Single is \$40.48 per month
2-Person is \$59.78 per month
Family is \$72.43 per month

**While many other rates have gone up, ours has not.
Same rates for several years!**

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Legacy on the Prairie

A Newsletter from the Second Century Habitat Fund

14,448 acres. 162 landowners. \$4.5 million invested in habitat right here in South Dakota.

Dear Friends,

If anyone thinks conservation slows down when things get complicated - 2025 proved otherwise.

This year, Second Century Habitat Fund kept habitat moving forward across South Dakota's working lands, pairing strong partnerships with real, measurable impact.

Here's what 2025 looked like on the ground:

162 landowners served through SCHF programs.

2,190 acres enrolled in 2025 alone, adding to

14,448 total acres funded since program launch.

111 active contracts currently delivering habitat benefits.

Nearly \$4.5 million invested directly into habitat projects.

And alongside that on-the-ground work, SCHF hit several major milestones:

SCHF secured a new National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Northern Great Plains grant and moved those dollars to work almost immediately — contracting the available funds within just a couple of weeks of the grant opening. That \$815,315 investment has already supported 1,384.4 acres in western South Dakota, a pace that speaks directly to strong landowner demand and a clear need for habitat investment across South Dakota's working lands.

At the same time, SCHF successfully closed out the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's ConocoPhillips Spirit of Conservation Grant, completing 1,100 acres of cropland-to-grassland conversion through a \$300,000 program. These projects delivered durable wildlife habitat while maintaining long-term agricultural viability for participating producers and adding value to their operations by allowing grazing or haying through our Working Lands Program.

We also closed the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Conservation Partnership Program Grant, implementing high diversity interseeding and managed grazing practices on 2,854.8 acres, with \$773,656 invested directly into habitat improvements on working lands. These projects strengthened pollinator habitat, forage resilience, and overall ecosystem health.

Together, these grants demonstrate more than funding success. They show that SCHF can secure, deploy, and close national-scale conservation investments — and do it in a way that works for landowners and delivers real results on the ground.

2025 also marked my first year as Executive Director of SCHF.

I stepped into this role with a clear focus on continuity, accountability, and strengthening partnerships — ensuring landowners, agencies, conservation organizations, and funders were aligned around shared goals. That focus paid off. Together, we delivered one of the strongest years in the organization's history - both financially and on the ground.

That progress was supported by a healthy and diversified financial foundation. In 2025 alone, SCHF generated more than \$1 million in total revenue and finished the year with a positive net income of \$465,000, while continuing to reinvest dollars directly into habitat. Since our inception, SCHF has invested more than \$4.47 million directly into on-the-ground conservation.

Diversified fundraising played a key role in that stability. In 2025, SCHF's auction and raffle efforts gener-

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ated more than \$220,000 in unrestricted support, providing the flexible dollars needed to match grants, respond quickly to landowner demand, and keep habitat projects moving without delay.

But 2025 wasn't just about acres, grant totals or financials.

It was about trust — landowners choosing conservation because it works for their operation. It was about credibility — proving SCHF can manage complex funding responsibly and at scale. And it was about momentum — showing that habitat conservation in South Dakota isn't slowing down.

As we head into year-end, we're asking you to help keep that momentum going.

A year-end gift to SCHF allows us to respond quickly when landowners are ready, provide match for competitive grants, and keep habitat projects moving at the pace the landscape demands.

Whether you give \$50 or \$5,000, your support turns opportunity into action — real acres, real projects, and real results.

Looking ahead to 2026, our focus is clear:

Build on what worked, strengthen the partnerships that made this year possible, and turn strong demand into even more acres on the ground. With projects already lining up and landowners ready to participate, we're committed to making 2026 even more impactful than 2025 — for habitat, for working lands, and for South Dakota's outdoor heritage.

Thank you for being part of a year where habitat didn't just get talked about — it got done.

See you in the field!

Elysabeth 'Liz' Kierl

Executive Director

BFM Highlights Strong Growth and AAA Credit Rating in FY 2025 Financial Report

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, the Bureau of Finance and Management (BFM) highlighted our state's strong growth and AAA credit rating by releasing South Dakota's Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) for fiscal year 2025.

"South Dakota's fiscal integrity is the cornerstone of our state, and a well-managed government drives economic growth," said Governor Larry Rhoden. "Guided by fiscal conservatism, we will keep taxes low, limit regulation, maintain our AAA credit rating, identify efficiencies, and enhance transparency."

The ACFR provides audited financial statements for South Dakota's state government, reflecting collaboration between BFM, state agencies, and the Department of Legislative Audit.

Highlights from the fiscal year 2025 ACFR include:

The State's net position grew to \$10.3 billion, up \$488.8 million (5%) from last year;

The General Fund balance reached \$1.7 billion, an increase of \$68.4 million (4.3%) since last year;

The State avoided new debt by setting aside \$593.2 million in the Incarceration Construction Fund; and AAA credit rating maintained for nine consecutive years by all three major agencies.

View the full ACFR online at <https://bfm.sd.gov/ACFR/>. For printed copies, call BFM at 605-773-3411.

South Dakota Department of Health Reports First Two Flu Deaths of the 2025-2026 Flu Season

PIERRE, SD – The Department of Health is reporting the first two influenza deaths of the 2025 - 2026 season, both Minnehaha County residents in the >64-year age group.

“Influenza can be a very serious illness,” said Dr. Joshua Clayton, State Epidemiologist for the Department of Health. “Taking preventative measures like regularly washing hands, covering your cough, and getting vaccinated if you choose against flu will protect you and your family.”

Clayton noted influenza activity is increasing statewide with 2,824 lab-confirmed flu cases and 154 hospitalizations reported; an average of 40 South Dakotan deaths are reported each year.

During the flu season, we encourage all South Dakotans to take the following preventative actions to help slow the spread of the flu:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick;
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand gel;
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth;
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze; and
- Stay home if you are sick.

In addition to preventative actions, yearly flu vaccinations are recommended for everyone age six months and older. Groups like pregnant women, children younger than five years, people over 65 years, and people with chronic medical conditions are at higher risk for flu-related complications. Healthcare workers and household contacts of high-risk populations, such as those with young infants, should also be vaccinated.

A list of participating locations offering flu vaccines in your community can be found online. For more information and the latest resources, visit the DOH website.

Influenza is a virus spread by respiratory droplets when an infected person talks, coughs, or sneezes. Common signs and symptoms of the flu include fever, cough, sore throat, headache, fatigue, body or muscle aches, and runny or stuffy nose.

At the heart of the Department of Health’s mission is a simple yet profound goal: to protect and improve the health of all South Dakotans. The department is entrusted with the vital task of promoting wellness, preventing disease, and ensuring access to quality healthcare for all South Dakotans across our great state.

Names Released in Kingsbury County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash

Where: US Highway 14, mile marker 399, on the west edge of Arlington, SD

When: 7:06 p.m., Friday, December 26, 2025

Driver 1: Peter Juergen Ritschel, 62-year-old male from Faribault, MN, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2016 Mercedes-Benz Metris

Seat belt Used: Yes

Driver 2: Lauren Hser, 37-year-old male from Huron, SD, serious, non-life-threatening injuries

Vehicle 2: 2015 Chevrolet Silverado 2500

Seat belt Used: Yes

Kingsbury County, S.D.- A Minnesota man died and another was seriously injured in a two-vehicle crash Friday evening near Arlington, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Peter Juergen Ritschel, the driver of a 2016 Mercedes-Benz Metris, was traveling eastbound on US 14 near mile marker 399 and crossed the center line, colliding head-on with a 2015 Chevrolet Silverado 2500, driven by Lauren Hser, in the westbound lane.

Ritschel died at the scene. Hser sustained serious, non-life-threatening injuries.

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

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



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Judge slams Noem over termination of temporary legal status for 60,000 immigrants

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — A federal judge in California Wednesday found the Trump administration unlawfully terminated temporary protections for more than 60,000 nationals from Honduras, Nepal and Nicaragua.

In a scathing 52-page order, Northern District of California Judge Trina Thompson found that Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem did not go through the proper federal procedures to end the designations for Temporary Protected Status for those three nations.

“The President is not above the law,” Thompson, nominated by former President Joe Biden, wrote in her order. “Neither are his cabinet officials. The Administrative Procedures Act ensures government accountability by making agencies transparent, require public participation, setting fair rulemaking standards, and allowing courts to review actions for legality and rationality.”

Thompson found that Noem did not sufficiently review country conditions or provide a minimum six-month winding-down period leading to the end of temporary legal status, a practice that the agency has followed for decades.

“Taken together, the Court finds that the Secretary improperly narrowed the scope of her review of the conditions of the countries at issue in this litigation before making her termination decision,” Thompson said. “The Secretary’s narrowing was based on an erroneous reading of the TPS statute and history of DHS practice.”

A country receives a TPS designation if it meets certain conditions, such as a major natural disaster, violence, or some other instability that makes a country too dangerous for its citizens’ return.

About 52,000 TPS recipients hail from Honduras, more than 7,100 are nationals from Nepal and nearly 3,000 TPS holders are from Nicaragua.

The judge also denied the Department of Justice’s motion to dismiss the case.

“Our laws should not favor the loud and powerful simply because of their positions. Yet, for too long, our laws have overlooked the quiet truths—truths carried in the margins, truths lived but never spoken aloud,” Thompson said.

“It is the duty of every public servant entrusted with shaping a more just society to bring those truths into the open, to translate lived experience into written protection. It means hearing the faintest whisper of injustice and refusing to let it fade. It means honoring the people who call this country home but have never been invited to speak in it. It means finally ensuring that the law speaks for them,” she continued.

DHS did not immediately respond to States Newsroom’s request for comment.

All three country designations were set to expire by September, but in July, Thompson halted the terminations. In late August, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals allowed the TPS terminations to continue, meaning that work authorizations for those recipients expired.

Separately, another judge in Boston, Massachusetts temporarily halted the TPS termination for more than 200 nationals from South Sudan on Tuesday, also finding a move by Noem is likely unlawful. TPS for South Sudan is set to expire Jan. 6.

This year, the Trump administration has aggressively moved to revoke the legal status of TPS recipients, and those with some other form of humanitarian legal status. So far, about 1 million immigrants under TPS, along with another half a million, have lost their status.

Ariana covers the nation’s capital for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include immigration, congressional

policy and legal challenges with a focus on how those policies impact the lives of immigrants and migrants coming to the U.S.

Trump gives up on National Guard deployment in 3 cities

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump announced Wednesday that he will back off his plans to use National Guard troops in the Democratic-led cities of Chicago, Los Angeles and Portland, Oregon.

The move follows the Supreme Court's decision last week that found Trump could not deploy guard members to Chicago, ruling that the president did not meet the requirements to send guard members to the Windy City for the purpose of assisting with federal immigration enforcement.

Several federal judges have either blocked the deployments or found them unlawful. The Posse Comitatus Act of 1878, generally prevents the military from participating in civilian law enforcement.

"We will come back, perhaps in a much different and stronger form, when crime begins to soar again — Only a question of time!" Trump wrote on his social media site, TruthSocial.

The president first deployed National Guard troops earlier this summer to Los Angeles, following massive protests against immigration raids.

He has continued to send service members to cities with Democratic leaders, a decision that has tested the legal bounds of presidential authority on military law all the way up to the Supreme Court.

An appeals court in early December ruled that the Trump administration must remove troops from Los Angeles, which upheld a lower court ruling that found it illegal to keep an extended military presence long after protests quelled.

In November, a federal judge permanently blocked the Trump administration from deploying hundreds of National Guard troops to Portland, Oregon.

The judge, Karin Immergut, found the move to use service members for the purpose of protecting a federal immigration facility exceeded presidential authority. Trump nominated Immergut in his first term.

Guard members are still deployed in the District of Columbia; Memphis, Tennessee; and New Orleans, Louisiana.

Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include immigration, congressional policy and legal challenges with a focus on how those policies impact the lives of immigrants and migrants coming to the U.S.

After Minnesota fraud allegations, HHS orders states to justify child care spending

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA

WASHINGTON — States must now provide "justification" that federal child care funds they receive are spent on "legitimate" providers in order to get those dollars, President Donald Trump's administration announced.

The Tuesday shift in policy came following allegations of fraud in Minnesota's child care programs, which prompted the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to freeze all child care payments to the state.

HHS could not offer many specifics on how the review process will play out for other states, but clarified that the money in question is provided through the multibillion-dollar federal Child Care and Development Fund, or CCDF.

"States will be required to provide documentation, such as written justification, receipts, or photographic evidence, demonstrating that funds are supporting legitimate child care providers," Emily Hilliard, a spokesperson for HHS, said in a statement to States Newsroom on Wednesday.

CCDF provides federal funding to states, territories and tribes to help low-income families obtain child care.

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The program, administered within the Office of Child Care under HHS' Administration for Children and Families, combines funding from the Child Care and Development Block Grant, or CCDBG, and the Child Care Entitlement to States, or CCES.

Funding for CCDF in fiscal year 2025 stood at roughly \$12.3 billion — comprising \$8.75 billion from CCDBG and \$3.55 billion from CCES.

Head Start — a separate program that provides early childhood education, nutritious meals, health screenings and other support services to low-income families — does not appear to be affected.

In a Tuesday social media post announcing the move, Health and Human Services Deputy Secretary Jim O'Neill said he had "activated our defend the spend system for all ACF payments" and "starting today, all ACF payments across America will require a justification and a receipt or photo evidence before we send money to a state."

He clarified in a separate post shortly after that "funds will be released only when states prove they are being spent legitimately."

Funds undergo 'regular audits'

"Federal funding enables millions of parents in every state and Congressional district to access and afford quality child care," Sarah Rittling, executive director of First Five Years Fund, a federal advocacy group, said in a Wednesday statement.

Rittling added that "these funds are essential to the nation's well-being, allowing parents to work while ensuring their children are cared for and safe."

She also described the reports of potential fraud as "deeply concerning" and pointed out that "state oversight through regular audits is required by law to ensure that every dollar intended to protect and support young children is used properly and effectively."

"At the same time, we must ensure that nothing takes away from making sure funds for child care continue to reach the children and families who depend on them," she said.

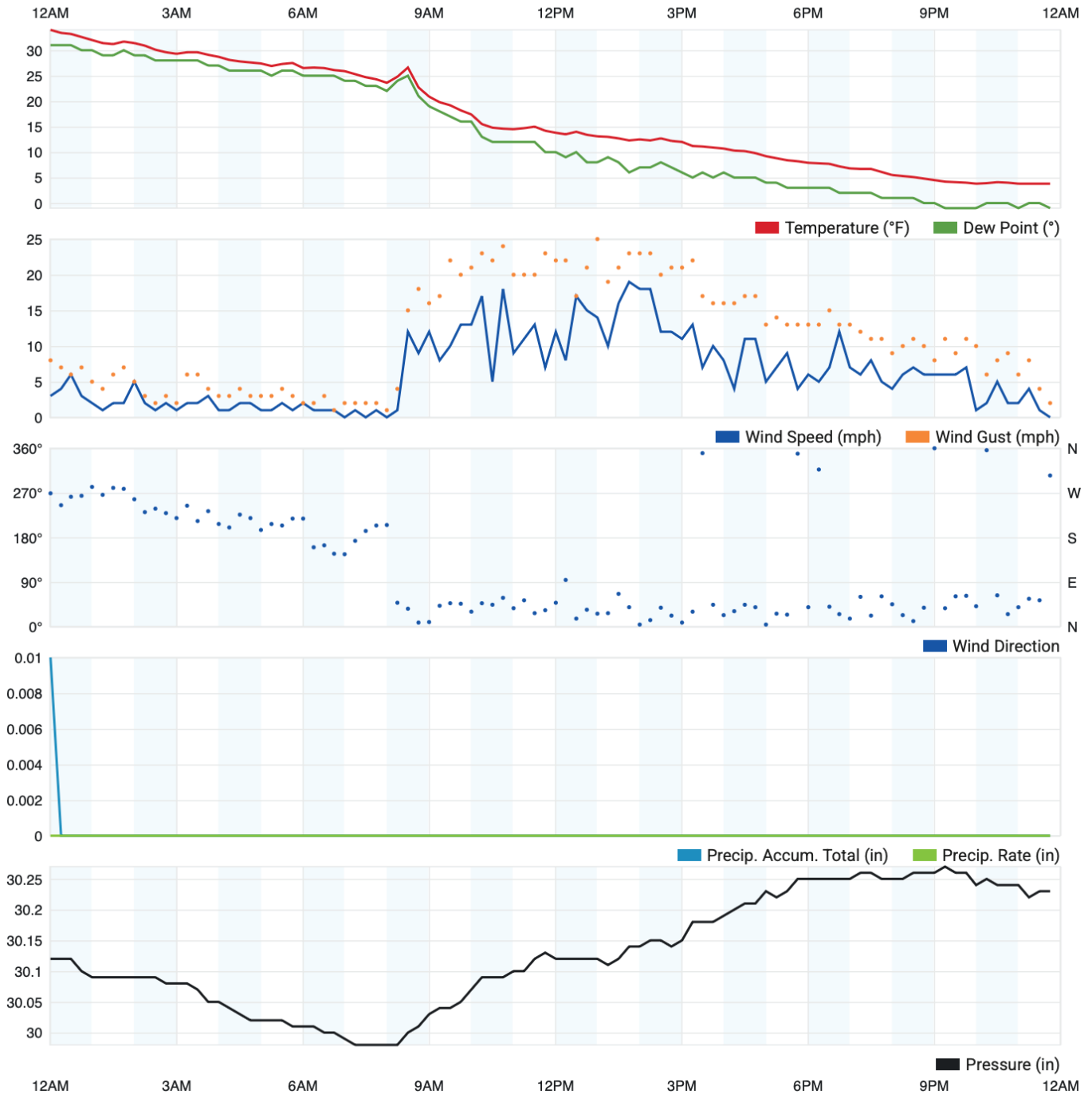
Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom's Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

December 31, 2025



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New Year's
Day



High: 15 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Tonight



Low: 8 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Friday



High: 17 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Friday Night



Low: 11 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Saturday



High: 22 °F

Partly Sunny

Slow Steady Warming Trend



Thursday



Highs: 10-40°

Flurries NE
SD &
Western MN

Friday



Highs: 12-28°

Lows: 3-18°

Flurries

Saturday



Highs: 18-41°

Lows: 9-19°

Sunday



Highs: 23-48°

Lows: 5-23°

Monday



Highs: 29-54°

Lows: 14-28°

Warmest Central SD Coldest Northeast SD/Western MN

A little bit colder air moves in to close out the week, resulting in some light snow/flurries, but generally the trend for the weekend and early next week will be a steady warming of temperatures. Sun may be a little hard to come by over the next few days though.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 34 °F at 12:00 AM

Low Temp: 4 °F at 10:53 PM

Wind: 27 mph at 1:15 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 53 in 1998

Record Low: -32 in 2018

Average High: 24

Average Low: 4

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.02

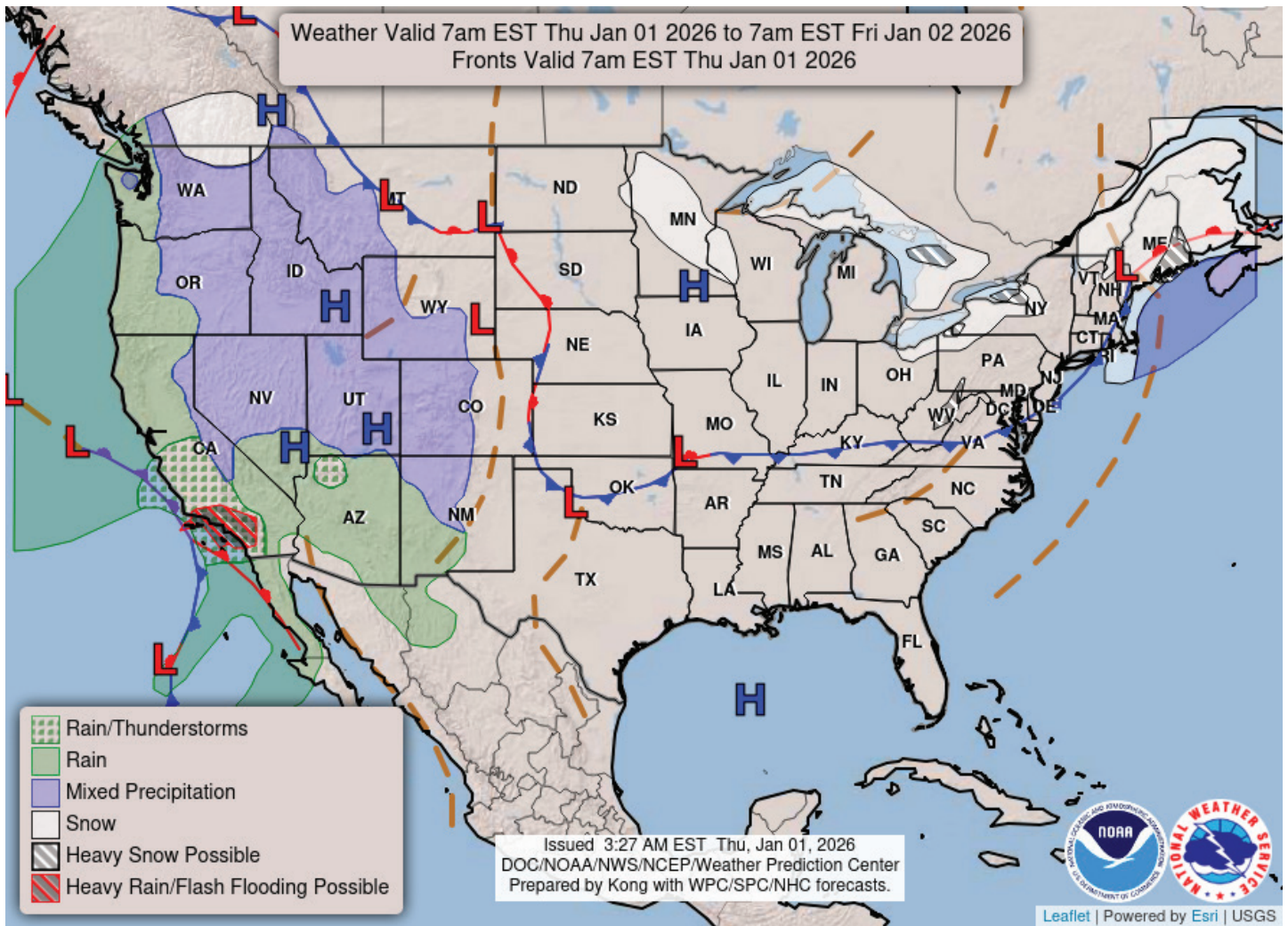
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.02

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 4:59 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:12 am



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Today in Weather History

January 1, 1960: The winter storm began on New Year's Eve as a low-pressure center moved from Colorado northeast to the Great Lakes. Snowfall ranged from 5 to 10 inches across central and northeast South Dakota. High winds on the 1st and 2nd caused low visibilities and drifted highways over affecting holiday travel. There were scattered power and telephone outages due to breakage from wind and ice. The storm winded down in the afternoon of the 2nd.

1767: The morning temperature in Boston was -8°F! Jan 1, 1767 Boston Cold

1864: A historic cold blast of air charged southeast from the Northern Plains to Ohio Valley. Chicago had a high temperature of -16°. A farmer near Hometown, Indiana, reported the same high temperature as Chicago, with a low of 21 degrees below zero. He remarked "rough day" in his weather diary. Minneapolis had a temperature of 25 degrees below zero at 2 PM. St. Louis, Missouri, saw an overnight low of 24 degrees below zero. The Mississippi was frozen solid with people able to cross it.

1886: Norway's coldest night on record occurred as the low temperature dropped to -60.5°F at Karasjok.

1888: The Signal Corps office opened in Rapid City, South Dakota, on January 1, 1888. It was located in the Sweeney Building at the corner of 7th and Main Streets. The high and low temperature that day was 6 and -17°F.

1892: At Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, dandelions were in bloom in parks.

1934 — Heavy rain which began on December 30th led to flooding in the Los Angeles Basin area of California. Flooding claimed the lives of at least 45 persons. Walls of water and debris up to ten feet high were noted in some canyon areas. Rainfall totals ranged up to 16.29 inches at Azusa, with 8.26 inches reported in Downtown Los Angeles. (The Weather Channel)

1935: The Associated Press Wire Photo Service made its debut, delivering the great weather maps twice each day to newspapers across the country. The first photo transmitted was a plane crash in the Adirondack of New York on this day. The plane crashed during the evening hours on December 28, but the rescue did not occur until New Year's Day.

1949 — A six day blizzard began over the Northern Rockies and the Great Plains. The storm produced the most adverse weather conditions in the history of the west. (David Ludlum)

1961: A three-day-long ice storm was beginning over northern Idaho, which produced an accumulation of ice eight inches thick, a U.S. record. Dense fog, which blanketed much of northern Idaho from Grangeville to the Canadian border, deposited the ice on power and phone lines, causing widespread power outages.

1964: A snowstorm struck the Deep South on December 31st, 1963, through January 1st, 1964. Meridian MS received 15 inches of snow, 10.5 inches blanketed Bay St Louis MS, and 4.5 inches fell at New Orleans, LA. The University of Alabama Head Football Coach "Bear" Bryant said that the only thing that could have messed up his team's chances in the Sugar Bowl against Ole Miss in New Orleans, LA was a freak snowstorm. Well, much to his chagrin, 4.5 inches of snow fell the night before the big game. Alabama won the game 12-7 anyway. Freezing temperatures then prevailed for New Year's Day. NWS Nashville and NWS Huntsville.

1979 — The temperature at Maybell CO plunged to 60 degrees below zero to tie the state record set back in 1951 at Taylor Park. (The Weather Channel)

1999: The start of 1999 was ushered in with snow, ice, and freezing weather across central and south-central Nebraska. On New Year's Day, a steady snowfall along and north of Interstate 80 dumped from 1 to 5 inches of snow. By late morning, freezing drizzle developed southeast of Hastings and eventually coated area roads with a layer of ice. Light snow later that evening made travel even more treacherous. Several accidents occurred on the Interstates and Highway 30. Once the ice and snow ended, arctic air spilled across the area abroad 20 to 30 mph north winds. Blowing and drifting of the fallen snow caused reduced visibilities for a time on the 2nd. Temperatures dropped to 5 to 15 below zero through midday the 3rd.

2011: Southern and central Mississippi saw 11 tornadoes during the night of December 31st into the morning hours of January 1st. Of the 11, two were EF-3 with two more EF-2. Six were EF-1 with one EF-0.



Daily Devotion

Keeping Our Eyes on His Goals

Have you asked God what He wants to accomplish through your life?

Philippians 3:13-15: 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,

14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;

Have you ever attempted to walk in a straight line while looking at your feet? (Try this on a beach or in wet grass so you can look back at your footprints. It's interesting to see what happens.) You'll probably be surprised at how crooked your steps are. But fix your eyes on something far away, and each step will generally point in the desired direction—toward that distant focal point.

Our lives are like this. If we set goals, then our decisions and thoughts will more likely lead toward the desired end. Goals are crucial to the well-lived life.

Think about the many things Jesus did. He served others and taught those who sought righteousness. But more than that, our Savior's primary purpose, set even before time began, was to lay down His life in order to reconcile mankind to the Father and bring Him glory.

We were created to surrender our life for God and be fruitful in His service. Imagine the potential impact if we kept our eyes on the Lord and relied on Him to determine our goals. Each day ask God, "What do You want to accomplish through me?" and let Him determine your focus and priorities (Psalm 119:105). In time, you'll be able to see how intentionally keeping your eyes on Him made all the difference.

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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- 9 Months \$42.60
- 12 Months \$53.25

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

The following will be used for your log-in information.

E-mail _____

Password _____

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.30.25

18 43 49 63 69 6

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$157,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 24 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.31.25

12 13 37 43 51 8

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$11,350,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 39 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.31.25

26 30 41 43 47 12

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 54 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.31.25

19 20 24 32 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$165,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 54 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.31.25

24 35 42 46 68 14

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 23 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.31.25

11 18 21 24 38 26

Power Play: 10x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$64,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 23 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Castlewood 64, Dell Rapids 59
Chadron, Neb. 46, Custer 43
Colman-Egan 52, Arlington 35
DeSmet 58, Baltic 48
Deubrook 58, Waverly-South Shore 36
Deuel 45, Chester 35
Elk Point-Jefferson 44, Gettysburg 40
Flandreau 54, Estelline-Hendricks 47
Garretson 58, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 30
Hamlin 65, Dell Rapids St Mary's 31
Harrisburg 61, Aberdeen Central 31
Jonesboro, Ga. 60, Lennox 33
Madison 79, Elkton-Lake Benton 72, OT
Sioux Valley 77, Iroquois-Lake Preston 51
West Central 85, Lakota Tech 17
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Mitchell vs. Totino-Grace, Minn., ccd.

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

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Mitchell 54, Sisseton 40
Wagner 61, Winner 24
West Central 62, Pender, Neb. 57
Chadron Tournament=
Custer 47, Lusk, Wyo. 35

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

Anderson's 14 help North Dakota State take down South Dakota 84-61

By The Associated Press undefined
FARGO, N.D. (AP) — Treyson Anderson had 14 points in North Dakota State's 84-61 victory over South Dakota on Wednesday.

Anderson had five rebounds for the Bison (11-5, 1-0 Summit League). Trevian Carson scored 13 points and added seven rebounds, seven assists, and five steals. Tay Smith had 13 points and shot 5 for 8, including 3 for 6 from beyond the arc.

The Coyotes (8-8, 0-1) were led by Isaac Bruns, who recorded 17 points and six rebounds. Uziah Buntyn added 15 points and two steals for South Dakota. Cameron Fens also had 10 points and seven rebounds.

Farmers can now learn how much aid they will get from the Trump administration

By JOSH FUNK and DIDI TANG Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Farmers are now learning how much aid they can expect to receive from a \$12 billion package that President Donald Trump announced earlier this month.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture released the figures Wednesday for how much aid per acre farmers can plan on for each row crop. The details arrived after most farmers have already met with their bankers to arrange financing for next year's crops and placed orders for the seed and fertilizer they will need. But officials have promised that the payments should arrive by the end of February.

Soybean farmers have been hit especially hard by Trump's trade war with China, which stopped buying any American crops after Trump announced his tariffs this spring. China is the world's largest buyer of soybeans. This aid package is expected to help farmers weather the trade disruptions until China buys more soybeans under an agreement announced in October and until provisions of Trump's massive budget bill take effect later this year.

Soybean farmers will get \$30.88 per acre while corn farmers will receive \$44.36 per acre. Another crop hit hard when China stopped buying was sorghum, and those farmers will get \$48.11 per acre. The amounts are based on a USDA formula on the cost of production.

Farmers say they need more buyers for their crops

But farmers say the aid won't solve all their problems as they continue to deal with the soaring costs of fertilizer, seeds and labor that make it hard to turn a profit right now. Some agricultural trade groups have said they worry that thousands of farmers could go out of business, but others have said they believe most farmers have the financial resources and equity needed to survive.

Kentucky soybean farmer Caleb Ragland, who was president of the American Soybean Association until recently, said the aid is "a Band-Aid on a deep wound. We need competition and opportunities in the market to make our future brighter."

The President of the National Corn Growers Association Jed Bower also urged the Trump administration to focus on cultivating additional uses for their crops. Farmers will benefit from having more buyers whether it is for ethanol and animal feed at home or for international markets.

"Corn growers have been sounding the alarm about the fact that farmers have been faced with multiple consecutive years of low corn prices and high input costs," Bower said. "While this financial assistance is helpful and welcomed, we urgently need the administration and Congress to develop markets in the United States and abroad that will provide growers with more long-term economic certainty."

Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins said that is the goal and promised to continue working to open new markets while strengthening the safety net for farmers.

Minnesota Soybean Growers Association President Darin Johnson said the aid number for soybeans fell short of what farmers had been hoping for, so more help could be needed, though this package will help.

Most farmers remain steadfast supporters of Trump even after the disruptions caused by the trade war. They generally support many of his other policies and believe they will get a better trade deal in the end.

White House and farmers encouraged by China's purchases

These aid payments will add up to \$11 billion for row crop farmers who raise corn, soybeans, wheat, sorghum and other crops. Another \$1 billion has been set aside for specialty crops and sugar, but the administration hasn't released any details of aid for those crops.

After Trump met with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in South Korea in October, the White House said Beijing had promised to buy at least 12 million metric tons of U.S. soybeans by the end of the calendar year, plus 25 million metric tons a year in each of the next three years. Officials have said China is on track to meet the 12 million metric ton goal by the end of February.

As of Dec. 18, China had bought about 6 million metric tons of soybeans, according to the latest USDA's weekly report. Separately, the federal agency reported that China since then bought at least three more batches totaling 600,000 metric tons.

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Beijing has yet to confirm any commitment to buying 12 million metric tons of soybeans for this season, but the Chinese embassy in Washington said earlier this month that "agricultural trade cooperation between China and the United States is proceeding in an orderly manner."

However, the recent increase in international purchases is encouraging to farmers, said Tim Lust, CEO of the National Sorghum Producers, who has seen more than 1 million metric tons of sorghum purchased in just the past few weeks. Like soybeans, more than half of the sorghum crop is exported each year with China traditionally being the biggest buyer.

The aid payments will be capped at \$155,000 per farmer or entity, and only farms that make less than \$900,000 in adjusted gross income will be eligible. During the first Trump administration, a number of large farms found ways around the payment limits and collected millions.

The USDA says the average size of the 1.88 million farms nationwide was 466 acres last year, but many farmers are much larger than that as larger operations have continued to buy up neighboring farms over time.

Cities around the world welcome 2026 with thunderous fireworks and heightened security

By TED SHAFFREY and HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — From Sydney to Paris to New York City, crowds rang in the new year with exuberant celebrations filled with thunderous fireworks or light shows, while others took a more subdued approach.

As the clock struck midnight in Japan, temple bells rang and some climbed mountains to see the year's first sunrise, while a light show with somersaulting jet skis twinkled in Dubai. The countdown to 2026 was projected onto the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, while in Moscow people celebrated in the snow.

In New York City's Times Square, revelers braved frigid temperatures to celebrate with the famed New Year's Eve ball drop.

In Rio de Janeiro, crowds packed more than 4 kilometers (2 1/2 miles) of the city's Copacabana Beach for concerts and a 12-minute fireworks show, despite high tides and large waves that rocked barges carrying fireworks.

Other events were more subdued. Hong Kong held limited celebrations following a recent fire at an apartment complex that killed 161 people. Australia saluted the new year with defiance less than a month after its worst mass shooting in almost 30 years.

There was disaster in the Swiss resort town of Crans-Montana, where a fire at a bar in the early hours of the new year was presumed to have killed dozens of people.

Ball drop in New York City

Crowds bundled up against the chilly temperatures cheered and embraced as the New Year's Eve ball covered in more than 5,000 crystals descended down a pole and confetti fell in Times Square.

Revelers wearing tall celebratory hats and light-up necklaces had waited for hours to see the 12,350-pound (5,602-kilograms) ball drop. The festivities also included Tones and I performing John Lennon's "Imagine" just before midnight.

The television hosts interviewed visitors who were attending from such places as Florida, Mexico and South Korea, and read people's wishes for the new year. A sixth grader from Dallas, Texas, told one of the hosts that he wants to get good grades in 2026 and have a better year.

Police in the city had planned additional anti-terrorism measures at the ball drop, with "mobile screening teams." It was not in response to a specific threat, according to NYPD Commissioner Jessica Tisch.

Moments after the ball dropped it rose again, sparkling in red, white and blue, to mark the country's upcoming 250th birthday.

A few miles away in a decommissioned subway station, Zohran Mamdani was sworn in as mayor during a private event just after midnight Thursday.

More security in Sydney

A heavy police presence monitored crowds watching fireworks in Sydney. Many officers openly carried

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rapid-fire rifles, a first for the event, after two gunmen targeted a Hannukah celebration at Bondi Beach on Dec. 14, killing 15.

An hour before midnight, victims were commemorated with a minute of silence, and the crowd was invited to show solidarity with Australia's Jewish community.

New South Wales Premier Chris Minns had urged residents not to stay away from festivities, saying extremists would interpret smaller crowds as a victory: "We have to show defiance in the face of this terrible crime."

Shadows of war and disasters

Indonesia scaled back festivities in solidarity with communities devastated by floods and landslides in parts of Sumatra a month ago that killed over 1,100. Fireworks on the tourist island of Bali were replaced with traditional dances.

Hong Kong rang in 2026 without fireworks over Victoria Harbor after the massive fire in November. Facades of landmarks were turned into countdown clocks and a light show at midnight.

And in Gaza, Palestinians said they hope the new year brings an end to the conflict between Israel and Hamas.

"The war humiliated us," said Mirvat Abed Al-Aal, displaced from the southern city of Rafah.

Around Europe

Pope Leo XIV closed out the year with a plea for the city of Rome to welcome foreigners and the fragile. Fireworks erupted over European landmarks, from the Colosseum in Rome to the London Eye.

In Paris, revelers converged around the glittering Champs-Élysées avenue. Taissiya Girda, a 27-year-old tourist from Kazakhstan, expressed hope for a calmer 2026.

"I would like to see happy people around me, no war anywhere," she said. "Russia, Ukraine, Palestine, Israel, I want everybody to be happy and in peace."

In Scotland, where New Year's is known as Hogmanay, First Minister John Swinney urged Scots to follow the message of "Auld Lang Syne" by national poet Robert Burns and show small acts of kindness.

Greece and Cyprus turned down the volume, replacing traditional fireworks with low-noise pyrotechnics in capitals. Officials said the change was intended to make celebrations more welcoming for children and pets.

In Crans-Montana, a fire that swept through a bar at 1:30 a.m. caused heavy casualties, according to police. At a later press conference they said that dozens of people died and around 100 were hurt.

Capitol riot 'does not happen' without Trump, Jack Smith told Congress

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol "does not happen" without Donald Trump, former special counsel Jack Smith told lawmakers earlier this month in characterizing the Republican president as the "most culpable and most responsible person" in the criminal conspiracy to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

The Republican-led House Judiciary Committee released on Wednesday a transcript and video of a closed-door interview Smith gave about two investigations of Trump. The document shows how Smith during the course of a daylong deposition repeatedly defended the basis for pursuing indictments against Trump and vigorously rejected Republican suggestions that his investigations were politically motivated.

"The evidence here made clear that President Trump was by a large measure the most culpable and most responsible person in this conspiracy. These crimes were committed for his benefit. The attack that happened at the Capitol, part of this case, does not happen without him. The other co-conspirators were doing this for his benefit," Smith said, bristling at a question about whether his investigations were meant to prevent Trump from reclaiming the presidency in 2024.

"So in terms of why we would pursue a case against him, I entirely disagree with any characterization that our work was in any way meant to hamper him in the presidential election," he added.

The Dec. 17 deposition was conducted privately despite Smith's request to testify publicly. The release

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of the transcript and video of the interview, so far Smith's only appearance on Capitol Hill since leaving his special counsel position last January, adds to the public understanding of the decision-making behind two of the most consequential Justice Department investigations in recent history.

Trump was indicted on charges of conspiring to undo the 2020 election he lost to Democrat Joe Biden, and of willfully retaining classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida. Both cases were abandoned after Trump's 2024 election win, with Smith citing Justice Department policy against the indictment of a sitting president.

Smith repeatedly made clear his belief that the evidence gathered against Trump was strong enough to sustain a conviction. Part of the strength of the Jan. 6 case, Smith said, was the extent to which it relied on the testimony of Trump allies and supporters who cooperated with the investigation.

"We had an elector in Pennsylvania who is a former congressman, who was going to be an elector for President Trump, who said that what they were trying to do was an attempt to overthrow the government and illegal," Smith said. "Our case was built on, frankly, Republicans who put their allegiance to the country before the party."

Accounts from Republicans willing to stand up against the falsehood that the election had been stolen "even though it could mean trouble for them" created what Smith described as the "most powerful" evidence against Trump.

When it came to the Capitol riot itself, Smith said, the evidence showed that Trump "caused it and that he exploited it and that it was foreseeable to him."

Asked whether there was evidence that Trump had instructed supporters to riot at the Capitol, Smith said that Trump in the weeks leading to the insurrection got "people to believe fraud claims that weren't true."

"He made false statements to state legislatures, to his supporters in all sorts of contexts and was aware in the days leading up to Jan. 6th that his supporters were angry when he invited them and then he directed them to the Capitol," Smith said.

"Now, once they were at the Capitol and once the attack on the Capitol happened, he refused to stop it. He instead issued a tweet that without question in my mind endangered the life of his own vice president," he added. "And when the violence was going on, he had to be pushed repeatedly by his staff members to do anything to quell it."

Some of the deposition focused on Republican anger at revelations that the Smith team had obtained, and analyzed, phone records of GOP lawmakers who were in contact with Trump on Jan. 6. Smith defended the maneuver as lawful and by-the-book, and suggested that outrage over the tactic should be directed at Trump and not his team of prosecutors.

"Well, I think who should be accountable for this is Donald Trump. These records are people, in the case of the senators, Donald Trump directed his co-conspirators to call these people to further delay the proceedings. He chose to do that," Smith said. "If Donald Trump had chosen to call a number of Democratic senators, we would have gotten toll records for Democratic senators."

The communications between Trump and Republican supporters in Congress were an important component of the case, Smith said. He cited an interview his office did with Mark Meadows in which Trump's former chief of staff referenced that Rep. Jim Jordan, an Ohio Republican and current chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, had been in touch with the White House on the afternoon of the riot.

"And what I recall was Meadows stating that 'I've never seen Jim Jordan scared of anything,' and the fact that we were in this different situation now where people were scared really made it clear that what was going on at the Capitol could not be mistaken for anything other than what it was," Smith said.

Smith was also asked whether his team evaluated former White House aide Cassidy Hutchinson's explosive claim that Trump grabbed at the steering wheel of the presidential SUV when the Secret Service refused to let him go to the Capitol after a rally at the Ellipse on Jan. 6, 2021.

Smith told lawmakers that investigators interviewed the officer who was in the car, "who said that President Trump was very angry and wanted to go to the Capitol," but the officer's version of events "was not the same as what Cassidy Hutchinson said she heard from somebody secondhand."

Tatiana Schlossberg, a grandchild of the late President John F. Kennedy, has died at 35

By MARC LEVY and SARAH BRUMFIELD Associated Press

Environmental journalist Tatiana Schlossberg, one of three grandchildren of the late President John F. Kennedy, has died after she was diagnosed with leukemia last year. She was 35.

Schlossberg, daughter of Kennedy's daughter, Caroline Kennedy, and Edwin Schlossberg, revealed she had terminal cancer in a November 2025 essay in *The New Yorker*. A family statement disclosing her death was posted on social media Tuesday by the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation.

"Our beautiful Tatiana passed away this morning. She will always be in our hearts," the statement said. It did not disclose a cause of death or say where she had died.

Maria Shriver, a niece of John F. Kennedy and a former award-winning TV journalist, grieved for Schlossberg on social media and called her "the light, the humor, the joy" and a great journalist who "used her words to educate others about the earth and how to save it."

"She loved her life, and she fought like hell to try to save it," Shriver wrote.

Schlossberg told of being diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia in May 2024 at 34. While in the hospital for the birth of her second child, her doctor noticed her white blood cell count was high. It turned out to be acute myeloid leukemia with a rare mutation, mostly seen in older people.

In the November essay, "A Battle With My Blood," Schlossberg recounted going through rounds of chemotherapy and two stem cell transplants and participating in clinical trials. During the most recent trial, she wrote, her doctor told her "he could keep me alive for a year, maybe."

Schlossberg also criticized policies pushed by her mother's cousin, Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., in the essay, saying policies he backed could hurt cancer patients like her. Her mother had urged senators to reject his confirmation.

"As I spent more and more of my life under the care of doctors, nurses, and researchers striving to improve the lives of others, I watched as Bobby cut nearly a half billion dollars for research into mRNA vaccines, technology that could be used against certain cancers," the essay reads.

Schlossberg had worked as a reporter covering climate change and the environment for *The New York Times*' Science section. Her 2019 book "Inconspicuous Consumption: The Environmental Impact You Don't Know You Have" won the Society of Environmental Journalists' Rachel Carson Environment Book Award in 2020.

Schlossberg wrote in *The New Yorker* essay that she feared her daughter and son wouldn't remember her. She felt cheated and sad that she wouldn't get to keep living "the wonderful life" she had with her husband, George Moran.

While her parents and two siblings tried to hide their pain from her, she said she felt it every day. Her siblings, Rose and Jack Schlossberg, are JFK's other grandchildren.

"For my whole life, I have tried to be good, to be a good student and a good sister and a good daughter, and to protect my mother and never make her upset or angry," she said. "Now I have added a new tragedy to her life, to our family's life, and there's nothing I can do to stop it."

Schlossberg's mother Caroline was 5 years old when her father, President Kennedy, was assassinated in Dallas in 1963. She was 10 when her uncle, Robert F. Kennedy, was assassinated in Los Angeles in 1968 while he was running for president.

Caroline's brother, John F. Kennedy Jr., died in 1999 when the single-engine plane he was piloting plunged into the Atlantic Ocean, near Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. His wife, Carolyn, and her sister, Lauren Bessette, also died in the crash.

Shriver called Schlossberg valiant, strong and courageous.

"She was smart, wicked smart, as they say, and sassy. She was fun, funny loving, caring, a perfect daughter, sister, mother, cousin, niece, friend, all of it," Shriver wrote.

What to know about Trump administration freezing federal child care funds

By CHARLOTTE KRAMON and SARAH BRUMFIELD Associated Press/Report for America

The Trump administration has said it is freezing child care funds to all states until they provide more verification about the programs in a move fueled by a series of fraud schemes at Minnesota day care centers run by Somali residents.

All 50 states will be impacted by the review, but the Republican administration is focusing most of its ire on the blue state of Minnesota and is calling for an audit of some of its centers.

Minnesota Democratic Attorney General Keith Ellison said in a statement Wednesday that he was "exploring all our legal options to ensure that critical childcare services do not get abruptly slashed based on pretext and grandstanding."

It is unclear how much more robust the verification process for states will be than it already has been.

Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services Jim O'Neill called the decision a response to "blatant fraud that appears to be rampant in Minnesota and across the country" in a social media post announcing the change on Tuesday.

Here are some things to know about these moves:

More verification needed for all states to get child care funds

All 50 states will have to provide additional levels of verification and administrative data before they receive more funding from the Child Care and Development Fund, according to a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services spokesperson. However, Minnesota will have to provide even more verification for child care centers that are suspected of fraud, such as attendance and licensing records, past enforcement actions and inspection reports.

In his social media post on Tuesday, O'Neill said all Administration for Children and Families payments nationwide would require "justification and a receipt or photo evidence" before money is sent, but the HHS spokesperson said Wednesday that the additional verifications only apply to CCDF payments.

Walz says Trump is politicizing the issue

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, the 2024 Democratic vice presidential nominee, said in a social media post that fraudsters are a serious issue that the state has spent years cracking down on but that this is a political move that is part of "Trump's long game."

State Senate Majority Leader Erin Murphy condemned the move in a statement Wednesday.

"Republicans are playing sick games and winning devastating prizes," Murphy said. "And now, tens of thousands of Minnesota families will pay the price as Donald's Trump's agents strip away crucial funding."

Fraud investigations could stretch to other programs, states

The administration launched efforts in recent weeks to track down fraud in other programs in Minnesota and is looking at fraud in blue states such as California and New York, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said in an interview with "Fox & Friends" on Wednesday.

The administration will continue to send officers to investigate "potential fraud sites" in Minnesota and deport undocumented immigrants, Leavitt said, adding that the Department of Homeland Security is considering plans to denaturalize citizens.

The Department of Labor is also investigating the state's unemployment insurance program, Leavitt said. The administration this month threatened to withhold SNAP food aid funding from Democratic-controlled states, including Minnesota, unless they provide information about people receiving assistance.

Attention focused on Minnesota

The announcement came a day after U.S. Homeland Security officials conducted a fraud investigation in Minneapolis, questioning workers at unidentified businesses. Trump has criticized Walz's administration over the cases, capitalizing on them to target the Somali diaspora in the state, which has the largest Somali population in the U.S.

In his post Tuesday, O'Neill, who is serving as acting director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, referenced a right-wing influencer who posted a video last week claiming he found that day

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care centers operated by Somali residents in Minneapolis had committed up to \$100 million in fraud.

Meanwhile, there are concerns about harassment that home-based day care providers and members of the Somali community nationwide might face amid the vitriol, including Trump's comments earlier this month referring to Somali immigrants as "garbage." Washington state Attorney General Nick Brown released a statement saying, "Showing up on someone's porch, threatening, or harassing them isn't an investigation. Neither is filming minors who may be in the home."

Minnesota child care centers are alarmed

Maria Snider, director of the Rainbow Child Development Center and vice president of advocacy group Minnesota Child Care Association, said fear is rising among both families — many of which are living pay-check to paycheck — and child care centers that rely on the federal funding. Without child care system tuition, centers may have to lay off teachers and shut down classrooms, she said.

The Administration for Children and Families provides \$185 million in child care funds annually to Minnesota, according to Assistant Secretary Alex Adams.

In Minnesota, the application process for the funding is complex and multilayered, Snider said. Her own child care center has been subjected to random audits, she said, and all centers are required to submit to licensing visits by officials.

"I don't know what else I would provide," she said.

Ahmed Hasan, director of the ABC Learning Center that was one of those featured in the video by the right-wing influencer, said on Wednesday that there were 56 children enrolled at the center. Since the video was posted, Hasan, who is Somali, said his center has received harassing phone calls making staff members and parents feel unsafe.

He said the center is routinely subject to checks by state regulators to ensure they remain in compliance with their license.

"There's no fraud happening here," Hasan told The Associated Press. "We are open every day, and we have our records to show that this place is open."

Chief Justice says Constitution remains 'firm and unshaken' with major Supreme Court rulings ahead

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Chief Justice John Roberts said Wednesday that the Constitution remains a sturdy pillar for the country, a message that comes after a tumultuous year in the nation's judicial system with pivotal Supreme Court decisions on the horizon.

Roberts said the nation's founding documents remain "firm and unshaken," a reference to a century-old quote from President Calvin Coolidge. "True then; true now," Roberts wrote in his annual letter to the judiciary.

The letter comes after a year in which legal scholars and Democrats raised fears of a possible constitutional crisis as Republican President Donald Trump's supporters pushed back against rulings that slowed his far-reaching conservative agenda.

Roberts weighed in at one point in March, issuing a rare rebuke after Trump called for the impeachment of a judge who had ruled against him in a case over the deportation of Venezuelan migrants accused of being gang members.

The chief justice's Wednesday letter was largely focused on the nation's history, including an early 19th-century case establishing the principle that Congress shouldn't remove judges over contentious rulings.

He also called on judges to "continue to decide the cases before us according to our oath, doing equal right to the poor and to the rich, and performing all of our duties faithfully and impartially under the Constitution and laws of the United States."

While the Trump administration faced pushback in the lower courts, it has scored a series of some two dozen wins on the Supreme Court's emergency docket. The court's conservative majority has allowed Trump to move ahead for now with banning transgender people from the military, clawing back billions of

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dollars of congressionally approved federal spending, moving aggressively on immigration and firing the Senate-confirmed leaders of independent federal agencies.

The court also handed Trump a few defeats over the last year, including in his push to deploy the National Guard to U.S. cities.

Other pivotal issues are ahead for the high court in 2026, including arguments over Trump's push to end birthright citizenship and a ruling on whether he can unilaterally impose tariffs on hundreds of countries.

Roberts' letter contained few references to those issues. It opened with a history of the seminal 1776 pamphlet "Common Sense," written by Thomas Paine, a "recent immigrant to Britain's North American colonies," and closed with Coolidge's encouragement to "turn for solace" to the Constitution and Declaration of Independence "amid all the welter of partisan politics."

Zohran Mamdani to become NYC's next mayor with a midnight oath underground

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

Zohran Mamdani will become mayor of New York City as the clock ticks over into 2026 — but the celebrations are set to last through New Year's Day.

The Democrat's team is planning two separate swearing-in ceremonies Thursday — a small, private one with his family in an old subway station around midnight, followed by a large event in the afternoon that will include a public block party outside City Hall.

As a new mayor's term begins immediately with the new year, it has been customary for the city's incoming leaders to hold two events. Departing Mayor Eric Adams held his initial swearing-in at Times Square shortly after the famous ball drop, while Adams' predecessor Bill de Blasio took his first oath at home in Brooklyn.

For his part, Mamdani will take his initial oath at the former City Hall subway station in Manhattan — one of the city's original stops on its subterranean transit system, known for its tiled arches and vaulted ceilings.

New York Attorney General Letitia James, a political ally and notable foe of President Donald Trump, will administer the oath of office.

The old City Hall stop was designed as the flagship station of the city's first subway line but was decommissioned in 1945. These days, outside of occasional guided historical tours, locals can usually only catch a glimpse of it by staying on the 6 train after its last stop downtown when it turns around to head north.

The decision to be sworn in at the former City Hall subway station reflected his "commitment to the working people who keep our city running every day," his office said.

Mamdani said the station represents an era when New York invested in infrastructure meant to improve people's lives, an ambition he said his administration aims to carry forward.

On Thursday afternoon Mamdani will be sworn in again, this time by U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders, one of his political heroes, on the steps of City Hall in a ceremony. It's scheduled to kick off at 1 p.m. with opening remarks from U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, another political ally and a fellow New Yorker.

In both ceremonies Mamdani, who will be the city's first Muslim mayor, will place his hand on Qurans as he takes the oath of office, marking the first time a New York mayor has used Islam's holy text to be sworn in.

Mamdani's transition formed an inaugural committee that includes actor John Turturro, playwright Cole Escola and writer Colson Whitehead, as well as advocates, small business owners and campaign workers who the incoming mayor's office says have "provided perspective, guidance, and cultural sensibility" for the ceremony.

The public swearing-in will be accompanied by a block party along a stretch of Broadway leading up to City Hall. Mamdani's office expects thousands of people to attend and says there will be performances, music and interfaith elements.

In drawing attention to mayoral history, Mamdani's election also ended up illuminating a record-keeping

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glitch. A city archivist concluded that Mamdani appears to be the 112th mayor, not the 111th, as had been thought before historians flagged an oversight concerning a 17th-century mayor who served twice.

Mamdani has spent the past weeks staffing up his incoming government and made a series of key appointments as recently as Wednesday, hours before his swearing-in.

These bipartisan bills were noncontroversial — until Trump vetoed them

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump issued the first vetoes of his second term on Tuesday, rejecting two low-profile bipartisan bills, a move that had the effect of punishing backers who had opposed the president's positions on other issues.

Trump vetoed drinking water pipeline legislation from Republican Rep. Lauren Boebert of Colorado, a longtime ally who broke with the president in November to release files on convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. He also vetoed legislation that would have given the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida more control of some of its tribal lands. The tribe was among groups suing the administration over an immigration detention center in the Everglades known as "Alligator Alcatraz."

Both bills had bipartisan support and had been noncontroversial until the White House announced Trump's vetoes Tuesday night.

Trump appeared to acknowledge the tribe's opposition to the detention facility in a letter to Congress explaining his veto. "The Miccosukee Tribe has actively sought to obstruct reasonable immigration policies that the American people decisively voted for when I was elected," Trump wrote.

Trump did not allude to Boebert in his veto of her legislation, but raised concerns about the cost of the water pipeline at the heart of that bill.

In an interview later Wednesday with Politico, Trump also criticized the state's Democratic Gov. Jared Polis while saying that he issued the veto because "They're wasting a lot of money and people are leaving the state. They're leaving the state in droves. Bad governor."

Boebert, one of four House Republicans who sided with House Democrats early on to force the release of the Epstein files, shared a statement on social media suggesting that the veto may have been "political retaliation."

"I sincerely hope this veto has nothing to do with political retaliation for calling out corruption and demanding accountability. Americans deserve leadership that puts people over politics," her statement said. Boebert added in another post: "This isn't over."

The Florida legislation had been sponsored by Republican Rep. Carlos Gimenez, whom Trump has endorsed. Gimenez and the Miccosukee Tribe were not immediately available for comment on Wednesday.

When asked whether the vetoes were punishment, the White House did not answer and instead referred to Trump's statements explaining the vetoes.

Congress can override the vetoes by a vote of two-thirds of the members of the House and the Senate, but it's unclear if there's enough support in the Republican-controlled chambers to do so, especially heading into a midterm election year where many of them will be on the ballot and many GOP members will count on Trump's backing.

Boebert's legislation, the "Finish the Arkansas Valley Conduit Act," aimed to improve access to clean drinking water in eastern Colorado.

While the congresswoman has long been a staunch supporter of Trump, she found herself at odds with the president with her support this year for legislation that required the Justice Department to release files related to Epstein.

Trump fought the proposal before reversing in the face of growing Republican support for releasing the files. Members of his administration even met with Boebert in the White House Situation Room to discuss the matter, though she didn't change her mind.

Republican Rep. Jeff Hurd of Colorado, who co-sponsored the legislation, said he was "deeply disap-

pointed" by Trump's veto.

"This was a bipartisan, unanimous bill passed by Congress to uphold a long-standing federal commitment to southeastern Colorado," Hurd said in a statement.

He said the legislation did not authorize any new construction spending or expand the federal government's original commitment to the pipeline project, but adjusted the terms of repaying its costs.

Russian drone attack injures 3 Ukrainian children as Putin expresses confidence in victory

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian drones blasted apartment buildings and the power grid in the southern Ukraine city of Odesa in an overnight attack that injured six people, including a toddler and two other children, officials said Wednesday.

Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed confidence in his country's eventual victory in the nearly four-year war against its neighbor.

Four apartment buildings were damaged in the Odesa bombardment, according to regional military administration head Oleh Kiper. The DTEK power provider said two of its energy facilities had significant damage. The company said 10 substations that distribute electricity in the region have been damaged in December.

Russia has escalated attacks on urban areas of Ukraine. As its invasion approaches a four-year milestone in February, it has also intensified targeting of energy infrastructure, seeking to deny Ukrainians heat and running water in the bitter winter months.

Between January and November, more than 2,300 Ukrainian civilians were killed and more than 11,000 were injured, the United Nations said earlier in December. That was 26% higher than in the same period in 2024 and 70% higher than in 2023, it said.

Renewed diplomatic push to stop the fighting

Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff said he, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Trump's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner had a "productive call" with the national security advisers of Britain, France, Germany and Ukraine "to discuss advancing the next steps in the European peace process."

"We focused on how to move the discussions forward in a practical way on behalf of (Trump's) peace process, including strengthening security guarantees and developing effective deconfliction mechanisms to help end the war and ensure it does not restart," Witkoff said in a post on X.

He added that a main element of the conversation was the reconstruction of Ukraine and how to ensure its prosperity in the future.

Wednesday's call comes after U.S. President Donald Trump hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Sunday and announced that a settlement is "closer than ever before." European and Ukrainian officials plan to meet Saturday, lead Ukrainian negotiator Rustem Umerov reaffirmed, adding that U.S. representatives were expected to join remotely.

Zelenskyy also is due to hold talks next week with European leaders supporting his efforts to secure acceptable terms.

Putin is convinced of victory

Despite progress in peace negotiations, which he didn't mention, Putin reaffirmed his belief in Russia's eventual success in its invasion during his traditional New Year's address.

He gave special praise to Russian troops deployed in Ukraine, describing them as heroes "fighting for your native land, truth and justice."

"We believe in you and our victory," Putin said, as cited by Russian state news agency Tass.

The Russian Defense Ministry said 86 Ukrainian drones were shot down overnight over Russian regions, the Black Sea and the illegally annexed Crimea peninsula.

Russia claims Putin's residence was attacked

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Russia's Defense Ministry released a video of a downed drone that it said was one of 91 Ukrainian drones involved in an alleged attack this week on a Putin residence in northwestern Russia, a claim Kyiv has denied as a "lie."

The nighttime video showed a man in camouflage, a helmet and a Kevlar vest standing near a damaged drone lying in snow. The man, his face covered, talks about the drone. Neither the man nor the Defense Ministry provided any location or date.

The video and claims could not be independently verified.

Kyiv has denied the allegations of an attack on Putin's lakeside country residence and called them a ruse to derail progress in peace negotiations.

Ukraine's Center for Countering Disinformation said Wednesday the images could not be considered evidence of the attack as the origin of the damaged drone, as well as the time and location of the video itself, remained unknown.

"It took Russia more than two days to fabricate this 'evidence'. The photographs of metal fragments laid out on the snow, published by the Russian Defense Ministry, do not prove anything in themselves," the center said in a statement on its website.

"There is no video of air defense operations in the area of the residence, no recorded drone crashes in the claimed locations and no consistency even in its own figures, which have changed repeatedly."

Maj. Gen. Alexander Romanenkov of the Russian air force claimed that the drones took off from Ukraine's Sumy and Chernihiv regions. At a briefing where no questions were allowed, he presented a map showing the drone flight routes before they allegedly were downed by Russian air defenses over the Bryansk, Tver, Smolensk and Novgorod regions.

The European Union's foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, called the Russian allegations "a deliberate distraction" from peace talks.

Ukraine weapons fund receives billions of dollars

Zelenskyy said Romania and Croatia are the latest countries to join a fund that buys weapons for Ukraine from the United States.

The financial arrangement, known as the Prioritized Ukraine Requirements List, or PURL, pools contributions from NATO members, except the United States, to purchase U.S. weapons, munitions and equipment.

Since it was established in August, 24 countries are now contributing to the fund, according to Zelenskyy. The fund has received \$4.3 billion, with almost \$1.5 billion coming in December, he said on social media.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's Security Service carried out a drone strike on a major Russian fuel storage facility in the northwestern Yaroslavl region early Tuesday, according to a Ukrainian security official who was not authorized to speak publicly.

Long-range drones struck the Temp oil depot in the city of Rybinsk, part of Russia's state fuel reserve system, the official told The Associated Press. Rybinsk is about 800 kilometers (500 miles) from the Ukrainian border.

Thailand releases 18 Cambodian prisoners of war as part of ceasefire agreement

By SOPHENG CHEANG and WASAMON AUDJARINT Associated Press

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — Thailand on Wednesday released 18 Cambodian prisoners of war held for five months, fulfilling the terms of a ceasefire agreement the two countries signed to end bitter fighting along their border.

The release was stipulated in the ceasefire agreement, signed Saturday by the defense ministers of the two countries at the same border checkpoint between Thailand's Chanthaburi province and Cambodia's Pailin province where the soldiers were released.

"The repatriation of the 18 Cambodian soldiers was undertaken as a demonstration of goodwill and confidence-building, as well as in adherence to international humanitarian principles," Thailand's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

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Cambodia's Defense Ministry said the release "creates an environment conducive to peace, stability, and the full normalization of relations for the benefit of both nations and their people in the near future."

The soldiers' release removes a major impediment toward that goal after two rounds of destructive combat over competing territorial claims.

Thailand insisted it was allowed to hold the men under the Geneva Conventions' rules of war, which say prisoners can be detained until the end of hostilities. The prisoners were allowed visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross and other rights covered under international humanitarian law, Thai authorities said.

Their continued detention was used effectively by Cambodia's government to rally nationalist sentiment in the conflict against Thailand.

Wednesday's statement from Cambodia's Defense Ministry said the government "has remained steadfast in the promise made to the families of the 18 soldiers and the Cambodian people: that no soldier would be left behind."

The former prisoners were flown in the afternoon from western Cambodia to the capital, Phnom Penh, where they were greeted with hugs and visible emotion by their families as they stepped off a helicopter at the city's old airport.

They and their families were then taken by buses for what was reported to be a planned private meeting with Prime Minister Hun Manet.

Crowds outside the airport gates cheered and waved small flags as their motorcade passed. The freed men acknowledged the welcome by waving or displaying the traditional Asian greeting of clasping hands in prayer-like fashion in front of one's face or chest.

The ceasefire agreement said the soldiers would be freed if the end of combat was sustained for 72 hours after it came into effect at noon on Saturday. The 72 hours passed on Tuesday, but Thai authorities said they needed to evaluate the situation, claiming that 250 Cambodian drones had been active along the border.

The two countries had given differing accounts of the circumstances of the men's capture, which took place on the same day the initial ceasefire came into effect at the end of July.

Cambodian officials say their soldiers approached the Thai position with friendly intentions to offer post-fighting greetings, while Thai officials said the Cambodians appeared to have hostile intent and entered what Thailand considers its territory and subsequently were taken prisoner.

There were originally 20 Cambodia soldiers taken captive, but two were repatriated within days for what were said to be medical reasons.

The original July ceasefire was brokered by Malaysia and pushed through by pressure from U.S. President Donald Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges unless Thailand and Cambodia agreed. It was formalized in more detail in October at a regional meeting in Malaysia that Trump attended.

In Washington, the State Department welcomed steps taken to revive the ceasefire, including the release of the Cambodian troops.

"This demonstrates both countries' commitments to lasting peace by implementing the provisions of the Kuala Lumpur Peace Accords," the department said in a statement.

Despite those deals, the countries carried on a bitter propaganda war and minor cross-border violence continued, escalating in early December to widespread heavy fighting.

Thailand lost 26 soldiers and one civilian as a direct result of the combat since Dec. 7, according to officials. Thailand also reported 44 civilian deaths.

A rough year for journalists in 2025, with a little hope for things to turn around

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — By nearly any measure, 2025 has been a rough year for anyone concerned about freedom of the press.

It's likely to be the deadliest year on record for journalists and media workers. The number of assaults on reporters in the U.S. nearly equals the last three years combined. The president of the United States berates many who ask him questions, calling one woman "piggy." And the ranks of those doing the job continues to thin.

It's hard to think of a darker time for journalists. So say many, including Tim Richardson, a former Washington Post reporter and now program director for journalism and disinformation at PEN America. "It's safe to say this assault on the press over the past year has probably been the most aggressive that we've seen in modern times."

Tracking killings and assaults against journalists

Worldwide, the 126 media industry people killed in 2025 by early December matched the number of deaths in all of 2024, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, and last year was a record-setter. Israel's bombing of Gaza accounted for 85 of those deaths, 82 of them Palestinians.

"It's extremely concerning," said Jodie Ginsberg, CEO of the Committee to Protect Journalists. "Unfortunately, it's not just, of course, about the sheer numbers of journalists and media workers killed, it's also about the failure to obtain justice or get accountability for those killings.

"What we know from decades of doing this work is that impunity breeds impunity," she said. "So a failure to tackle journalists' killings creates an environment where those killings continue."

The committee estimates there are at least 323 journalists imprisoned worldwide.

None of those killed this year were from the United States. But the work on American soil has still been dangerous. There have been 170 reports of assaults on journalists in the United States this year, 160 of them at the hands of law enforcement, according to the U.S. Press Freedom Tracker. Many of those reports came from coverage of immigration enforcement efforts.

It's impossible to look past the influence of President Donald Trump, who frequently seethes with anger at the press while simultaneously interacting with journalists more than any president in memory — frequently answering their cellphone calls.

"Trump has always attacked the press," Richardson said. "But during the second term, he's turned that into government action to restrict and punish and intimidate journalists."

Journalists learn quickly they have a fight on their hands

The Associated Press learned that quickly, when Trump limited the outlet's access to cover him after it refused to follow his lead to rename the Gulf of Mexico. It launched a court fight that has remained unresolved. Trump has also extracted settlements from ABC and CBS News in lawsuits over stories that displeased him, and is suing The New York Times and Wall Street Journal.

Long angry about a perceived bias against conservatives on PBS and NPR newscasts, Trump and his allies in Congress successfully cut funding for public broadcasting as a whole. The president has also moved to shut down government-run organizations that beam news to all parts of the world.

"The U.S. is a major investor in media development, in independent media outlets in countries that have little or no independent media, or as a source of information for people in countries where there is no free media," Ginsberg said. "The evisceration of Radio Free Europe, Radio Free Asia and the Voice of America is another blow to press freedom globally."

Others in his administration take Trump's lead, like when his press office chose the day after Thanksgiving to launch a web portal to complain about outlets or journalists being unfair.

"It's part of this overall strategy that we're seeing from certain governments, notably the United States, to paint all journalists who don't simply (repeat) the narrative put out by the government as fake news,

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as dubious, as dodgy, as criminal," Ginsberg said.

Trump's defense secretary, Pete Hegseth, has portrayed journalists as dark figures skulking around Pentagon halls to uncover classified secrets as his rationale for putting in restrictive rules for coverage.

That's led to the most notable example of journalists fighting back: most mainstream news outlets gave up their credentials to work in the Pentagon rather than agree to these rules, and are still breaking stories while working off-site. The New York Times has sued to overturn the rules. The newspaper also publicly defends itself when attacked by the president, such as when he complained about its coverage of his health.

Despite the more organized effort against the press, the public has taken little notice. The Pew Research Center said that 36% of Americans reported earlier this year hearing a lot about the Trump administration's relationship with the press, compared to 72% who said that at the same point in his first term.

Pew's polling shows that trust in news organizations has declined over the last decade, and journalists are likely to elicit little sympathy when their work becomes harder.

"Really, the harm falls on the public with so much of this because the public depends on this independent reporting to understand and scrutinize the decisions that are being made by the most powerful office in the world," Richardson said.

Some reasons for optimism

The news industry as a whole is more than two decades in to a retrenchment caused largely by a collapse in the advertising market, and every year brings more reports of journalists laid off as a result. One of the year's most sobering statistics came in a report by the organizations Muck Rack and Rebuild Local News: in 2002, there were 40 journalists for every 100,000 people in the United States and by this year, it was down to just over eight.

Asked if they could find reasons for optimism, both Ginsberg and Richardson pointed to the rise of some independent local news organizations, shoots of growth in a barren landscape, places like the Baltimore Banner, Charlottesville Tomorrow in Virginia and Outlier Media in Michigan.

As much as they are derided in Trump's America, influential Axios CEO Jim VandeHei noted in a column recently that reporters at mainstream media outlets are still working hard and able to set the nation's agenda with their reporting.

As he told the AP: "Over time, people will hopefully come to their senses and say, 'Hey, the media like anything else is imperfect but, man, it's a nice thing to have a free press.'"

Trump made lots of tariff threats in 2025. Here are some that never materialized

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

President Donald Trump made a lot of tariff threats and trade promises this year. Many materialized into a barrage of new import taxes that overturned decades of U.S. economic policy — but others have yet to be fulfilled as 2025 comes to a close.

Some of Trump's unrealized threats reflect a broader approach from a president with a track record of using sky-high levies to pressure other countries into new trade deals, one-up retaliatory measures or even punish political critics. At the same time, they arrived as growing list of tariffs did go into effect — from Trump's punishing new taxes on imported metals, to tit-for-tat levies with top U.S. trading partners like China — plunging consumers and businesses worldwide into uncertainty.

Here's what Trump said when announcing some of his biggest (but still unrealized) tariff threats and promises this year, and where things stand today.

External Revenue Service

In his words:

1. Trump in a Jan. 14 social media post: "For far too long, we have relied on taxing our Great People using the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) ... We will begin charging those that make money off of us with Trade, and they will start paying, FINALLY, their fair share. January 20, 2025, will be the birth date of the External Revenue Service."

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2. Trump in his Jan. 20 inaugural address: "We are establishing the External Revenue Service to collect all tariffs, duties, and revenues. It will be massive amounts of money pouring into our Treasury, coming from foreign sources."

What happened: The External Revenue Service has yet to be established as of the end of December. While administration officials continued to reiterate plans for launching the External Revenue Service during Trump's first months back in office, the entity does not yet exist.

200% tariff on European wine, Champagne and spirits

In his words:

3. Trump in a March 13 social media post: "The European Union, one of the most hostile and abusive taxing and tariffing authorities in the World, which was formed for the sole purpose of taking advantage of the United States, has just put a nasty 50% Tariff on Whisky. If this Tariff is not removed immediately, the U.S. will shortly place a 200% Tariff on all WINES, CHAMPAGNES, & ALCOHOLIC PRODUCTS COMING OUT OF FRANCE AND OTHER E.U. REPRESENTED COUNTRIES."

What happened: The EU's planned levy on American whiskey — which it unveiled as part of broader retaliation in response to Trump's new steel and aluminum tariffs — was postponed, with the latest delay reportedly running until at least February.

Trump's 200% tariff threat on European alcohol never materialized. But spirits were not included in the EU-U.S. trade deal struck over the summer, which set a 15% rate on most European imports.

100% tariff on foreign-made films

In his words:

4. Trump in a May 4 social media post: "The Movie Industry in America is DYING a very fast death ... I am authorizing the Department of Commerce, and the United States Trade Representative, to immediately begin the process of instituting a 100% Tariff on any and all Movies coming into our Country that are produced in Foreign Lands."

5. Trump in a Sept. 29 social media post: "Our movie making business has been stolen from the United States of America, by other Countries, just like stealing 'candy from a baby' ... I will be imposing a 100% Tariff on any and all movies that are made outside of the United States."

What happened: Despite Trump's repeated threats, the U.S. has yet to impose a 100% tariff on foreign films. After his initial May promise to initiate the process, the White House said no final decision had been made. Also still unclear is how the U.S. would tax a movie made overseas.

Tariffs on pharmaceutical drugs

In his words:

6. Trump in a Cabinet meeting on July 8: "We'll be announcing something very soon on pharmaceuticals. We're going to give people about a year, a year and a half, to come in. And after that, they're going to be tariffed ... They're going to be tariffed at a very, very high rate, like 200 percent."

7. Trump in a Sept. 25 social media post: "Starting October 1st, 2025, we will be imposing a 100% Tariff on any branded or patented Pharmaceutical Product, unless a Company IS BUILDING their Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Plant in America."

What happened: The president did not sign an executive order imposing a 100% tariff on pharma products on Oct. 1 and, as of today, no levy has been put into place. But Trump previously suggested that steep levies on pharmaceutical drugs could arrive further down the road, telling CNBC in August that he would start by charging a "small tariff" and potentially raise the rate as high as 250%. Meanwhile, trade agreements with specific countries set their own rates or exemptions — with the U.K., for example, securing a 0% tariff on all British medicine exported to the U.S. for three years. The administration also announced deals with specific companies with promises of lower drug prices.

100% tariff on computer chips

In his words:

8. Trump on August 6: "We'll be putting a tariff of approximately 100% on chips and semiconductors ... But if you're building in the United States of America, there's no charge."

What happened: A sweeping 100% on computer chips has yet to go into effect. When announcing his

plans to impose the levy back in August, Trump was not specific about the timing. And other details have remained scarce.

\$2,000 tariff dividend

In his words:

9. Trump in a Nov. 9 social media post: "People that are against Tariffs are FOOLS! ... A dividend of at least \$2000 a person (not including high income people!) will be paid to everyone."

What happened: Details about how, when and if a tariff dividend will reach Americans are still scarce. Budget experts have said that the math doesn't add up. And Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent suggested that it might not mean checks from the government. Instead, Bessent told ABC in November, the rebate might take the form of tax cuts. White House National Economic Council Director Kevin Hassett also told CBS News that it's up to Congress.

China announces it 'successfully completed' Taiwan military maneuvers

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

BEIJING (AP) — China's People's Liberation Army said Wednesday that it "successfully completed" two days of military exercises in the waters off Taiwan, concluding a set of high-powered maneuvers aimed at asserting its sovereignty over the island — actions that ratcheted up tension in East Asia during 2025's waning days.

In a New Year's Eve announcement, the PLA said that the operation it called "Justice Mission 2025" had "fully tested the integrated joint operations capabilities of its troops."

"Always on high alert, the troops of the Theater Command will keep strengthening combat readiness with arduous training, resolutely thwart the attempts of 'Taiwan Independence' separatists and external intervention, and firmly safeguard state sovereignty and territorial integrity," Senior Capt. Li Xi, spokesperson for the PLA's Eastern Theater Command, was quoted as saying.

The brief announcement, presented on video accompanied by rousing martial music, offered no details about what constituted success, nor did it specify exactly when the exercises concluded. An earlier announcement had said they would take place during the day Monday and Tuesday, but it was unclear if any lingering drills had continued into Wednesday around Taiwan.

Sensitivities around Taiwan abound

Taiwan has long been China's most sensitive issue when it comes to the international community.

Beijing has long insisted the island is its sovereign territory and has promised to retake it by force if necessary. The self-governing island split from the mainland in 1949 after Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists retreated there upon losing a civil war with Mao Zedong's communists. That communist government has ruled the rest of China ever since.

Beijing sends warplanes and navy vessels toward the island on a near-daily basis, and in recent years it has stepped up the scope and scale of the exercises.

Chinese President Xi Jinping also weighed in Wednesday, albeit obliquely, making a brief reference to the Taiwan situation in an annual New Year's Eve speech to the nation. He said Chinese people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait share "a bond of blood and kinship."

"The reunification of our motherland, a trend of the times, is unstoppable," Xi said.

This week's military maneuvers were received in many corners as inflammatory, and China itself acknowledged they were designed to send a message to "external forces" — in short, anyone who might come between its government and the island it prizes.

Drills have been received critically

It has some targets in mind in that respect. In November, the prime minister of Japan — a nation that has a bumpy history with China after brutally colonizing parts of it in the early 20th century — said she wouldn't rule out military intervention if Taiwan faced direct attack by the PLA.

The Japanese Foreign Ministry said Wednesday that China's military exercises around Taiwan is "an act

that escalates tension in the Taiwan Strait” and that it has conveyed the concern to Beijing.

“Japan expects the issues surrounding Taiwan to be resolved peacefully through dialogue, which is a position that the Japanese government has consistently maintained all along,” it said in a statement. “The peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait are important for the entire international community. Japan continues to watch the related development with strong interest.”

And in mid-December, the United States announced a package of arms sales to Taiwan that, if approved by Congress, would represent the largest such aid to the island ever — a move criticized sharply by China.

In the Philippines, which has intermittent disputes with China over other territory in the South China Sea, Defense Minister Gilberto C. Teodoro Jr. said he was “deeply concerned by China’s military and coast guard actions around Taiwan,” saying they undermine stability “in an already fragile geopolitical environment.”

“This heightened scale of coercion has implications that extend beyond cross-Strait relations and into the broader Indo-Pacific community,” Teodoro said. “Basic principles of self-restraint must be observed.”

Earlier this week, U.S. President Donald Trump said he was not concerned because he has a good relationship with Xi and China has been “doing naval exercises for 20 years in that area.”

Latest deep-sea search for missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 gets underway

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL and HARUKA NUGA Associated Press

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — A deep-sea search for Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 began in the Indian Ocean on Wednesday, reviving efforts to solve one of aviation’s greatest mysteries more than a decade after the jet vanished with 239 people on board.

Malaysia’s Transport Ministry said Wednesday that a search vessel, the Armada 86 05, arrived at a designated search area with two autonomous underwater vehicles.

The location of the search area was not disclosed in the statement. It said the vessel had prepared for the search in Fremantle Port in Western Australia.

The government did not specifically mention Ocean Infinity, the company that helmed a previous search and had long been slated to lead the new one. But the craft that the government specified by number has been widely identified by maritime and aviation websites as belonging to Ocean Infinity.

Earlier in December, the Malaysian government said that the Texas-based marine robotics firm would begin searching targeted areas of the seabed under a renewed “no-find, no-fee” agreement.

Ocean Infinity has confirmed it was resuming the search for MH370 but refused to comment further, citing the “important and sensitive nature” of the operation.

Ocean Infinity previously searched the seabed in 2018, under a similar contract but found no trace of the plane. The company has said it has since upgraded its technology and refined its analysis. Its CEO Oliver Plunkett said last year the firm was working with multiple experts and had narrowed the search zone to what it believes is the most probable crash site.

Earlier this year, Ocean Infinity briefly restarted seabed search operations in a new 15,000-square-kilometer (5,800-square-mile) area of the southern Indian Ocean after receiving approval from Malaysia, but the effort was suspended in April because of poor weather.

The Malaysia Airlines plane disappeared from radar shortly after taking off from Kuala Lumpur for Beijing on March 8, 2014. Satellite data later showed the aircraft veered from its planned route and flew south toward the remote southern Indian Ocean, where investigators believe it crashed. There has never been an explanation for the course change.

A costly and protracted multinational search effort failed to locate the aircraft, though pieces of debris believed to be from the plane later washed up along the East Africa coast and on Indian Ocean islands. No main wreckage or bodies have ever been recovered.

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Channel Tunnel power malfunction fixed, but rail delays linger

PARIS (AP) — Trains were running again Wednesday in both directions through the Channel Tunnel between continental Europe and the United Kingdom but problems remained after a day of travel chaos caused by power malfunctions.

The tunnel operator, Eurotunnel, said the 50-kilometer (32-mile) undersea link was back to “full capacity” after a power fault inside it was fixed overnight Tuesday. The short statement didn’t detail the cause of the power failure.

But Eurostar, which runs passenger trains through the tunnel, warned of continued possible delays and cancellations because of “knock-on impacts” from the severe disruptions on Tuesday. Its website showed delays Wednesday to London-Paris, London-Brussels and London-Amsterdam trains in both directions and early morning cancellations.

Tuesday’s hours-long interruption of cross-Channel train services and a resulting cascade of cancellations upended travelers’ end-of-year getaway plans and provoked scrambles for flights and buses.

Another power malfunction Tuesday on the U.K. side that Eurostar said was related to the electrical fault inside the tunnel also caused severe delays for passengers aboard three trains, Eurostar said.

It said an overhead power cable fell onto a Eurostar train from London to Paris, near the tunnel entrance, and that an effort to move the train with its passengers inside proved “very complex.” The power failure also caused severe delays to two trains to Brussels, Eurostar said.

Passenger Ghislain Planque told French broadcaster BFMTV that his Eurostar journey Tuesday evening from London to France was meant to take just under 90 minutes but instead took around 11 hours, with passengers stuck overnight in the train that had only intermittent power.

“We were left without electricity, so with no heating, no air-conditioning, no possibility to charge phones,” he said. “We were in total darkness for some of the time.”

Today In History, January 1

Lincoln issues Emancipation Proclamation

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Jan. 1, the first day of 2026. There are 364 days left in the year. This is New Year’s Day.

Today in history:

On Jan. 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation during the Civil War, declaring that all enslaved people in rebellious states “are, and henceforward shall be free.”

Also on this date:

In 1804, Haiti declared itself independent from France, becoming the world’s first Black-majority republic.

In 1808, the federal law prohibiting the importation of enslaved people to the United States took effect.

In 1818, Mary Shelley’s novel “Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus” was first published in London, when Shelley was 20 years old.

In 1892, the Ellis Island Immigration Station in New York formally opened, processing nearly 700 immigrants on its first day; nearly 12 million immigrants would ultimately pass through the station before its closure in 1954.

In 1959, Fulgencio Batista resigned as Cuban president and fled the country, marking victory for Fidel Castro’s rebel troops and the Cuban Revolution.

In 2000, an anxious world held its breath as computers silently switched to the year 2000, but the dreaded “Y2K bug” caused few serious issues.

In 2013, thousands were trampled leaving a New Year’s fireworks display at a stadium in Ivory Coast, leaving at least 64 people dead amid the chaos.

In 2024, an earthquake rocked the west coast of Japan, collapsing homes, killing at least 260 people and forcing the evacuation of more than 3,000 others.

In 2025, a man driving a pickup truck that bore the flag of the Islamic State group slammed into revelers during New Orleans’ raucous New Year’s celebration, killing 15 people. The man was shot dead by police

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and the attack was subsequently investigated by the FBI as an act of terrorism.

Today's Birthdays: Filmmaker Frederick Wiseman is 96. Actor Frank Langella is 88. Musician Country Joe McDonald is 84. Actor-comedian Don Novello is 83. DJ Grandmaster Flash is 68. Actor Dedee Pfeiffer is 62. Actor Morris Chestnut is 57. Olympic gold medalist ice dancer Meryl Davis is 39. Rapper Ice Spice is 26.