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COUNTDOWN TO SUGAR BOWL KICKOFF

College Football Playoff: Everything you need to know as Georgia takes on Ole Miss at 8 p.m. today in CFP quarterfinal.

» Click here for more on tonight's game!



2026 could again reshape Georgia's political identity



President Donald Trump (from left), U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene and U.S. Sen Jon Ossoff are all shaping the 2026 political scene in Georgia. PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: PHILIP ROBIBERO/AJC | SOURCE: GETTY

President Trump plays a key role as state hurtles toward midterms.

By Greg Bluestein gbluestein@ajc.com

It was supposed to be a quieter year in Georgia politics – a pause between election cycles, a chance for both parties to regroup before the 2026 onslaught.

Instead, 2025 became a prelude to what is sure to be a political tempest.

President Donald Trump's return to office reset the national landscape almost overnight, forcing Republicans and Democrats alike to grapple with his expansive view of executive power, his disruptive agenda and the ripple effects

In Georgia, those aftershocks have transformed the terrain. Some Repub-



Democrats Peter Hubbard (left) and Alicia Johnson won seats on the Public Service Commission in November, AJC AND COURTESY PHOTOS

licans leaned into Trump's norm-shattering approach; others kept their distance. Democrats showed a new willingness to meet them head-on. Now Georgia barrels toward 2026

Once again, the state sits at the center of the national political map, poised to host some of the most expensive and closely watched contests in the country.

And once again, the outcome here could help define the direction of American politics, turning Georgia into a proving ground for competing ideas, coalitions and leadership styles.

Democratic U.S. Sen. Jon Ossoff's seat is among the nation's marquee midterm prizes, one of the few true Senate battlegrounds.

Midterms continued on A11

Activists cleared of RICO charges

Judge says state lacks authority to try training center protesters without governor's consent.

By Jozsef Papp

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More than three months after signaling he would, Fulton County Superior Court Judge Kevin Farmer issued an order Tuesday dismissing racketeering charges against

dozens of activists who protested against Atlanta's Public Safety Training Center.

In his order, Farmer said Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr did not have the authority to bring the Racketeer Influenced and **Corrupt Organizations** Act charges and had to seek permission from



Judge Kevin Farmer

Gov. Brian Kemp to do so, but did not in

"If the AG had sought and received permission from the governor to bring RICO charges, the check on the division of powers would be satisfied," Farmer wrote. "And that permission may still be sought and the charges brought properly, but they were not in this case.

Carr's office said Tuesday that they plan to appeal. Still, the order deals a major blow to Carr's office, which brought the massive case against 61 protesters two

Now, just a handful of defendants remain who continue to face arson and state domestic terrorism charges.

"We strongly disagree with this decision and will continue to vigorously pursue this domestic terrorism case to ensure that justice is served," the attorney general's office said in a statement Tuesday. Farmer originally announced his intention

RICO continued on A6

A year after deadly attack, UGA fans return to New Orleans

City leaders say state, federal law enforcement will ensure this year's Sugar Bowl is safe. National Guard will also be on scene.

By Alexis Stevens

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It should have been the perfect time for University of Georgia football fans.

A trip to New Orleans, New Year's Eve celebrations and a return to the Sugar Bowl.

But before French Quarter revelers made it back to their hotels - and just hours before the scheduled College Football Playoff game between the Bulldogs and Notre Dame – the fun came to a crashing halt. At 3:15 a.m. on Jan. 1, 2025, a 42-year-old Texas man drove a pickup truck into the Bourbon Street crowd and then exchanged gunfire with law enforcement, who killed him.

A year after the terrorist attack left 14 dead and injured 57, including UGA student Elle Eisele, the Bulldogs and their fans return to New Orleans this week for another Sugar Bowl game.

The city's leaders say they are ready, and they will have the support of state and national law enforcement. Many from Georgia say they're headed back, refusing to be scared while never forgetting the tragedy. The attack happened right below the hotel

room of Sandra Gerald's family. Hours earlier, the UGA graduate said, she and others watched the driver of a pickup truck barrel down a street, forcing pedestrians to quickly jump onto the sidewalk. She can't be sure, but Gerald said she wonders if it was the same driver who later returned to

Security continued on A6

TODAY'S TOP STORIES INSIDE



GEORGIA & THE SOUTH, A4

Decatur welcomes 'Walk for Peace' monks

Thousands flocked to the city to see a group of Buddhist monks whose march for peace from Texas to D.C. has caught the attention of many in the country.



OPINION, A13

In the new year, try to control what you can

We all like to worry about tomorrow, radio host and AJC Contributor Erick Erickson says. But confronting mortality (as his family has) helps us focus on today.



MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM, B1

Coach makes a case to keep job for 3rd season

Under Raheem Morris, the Falcons are carrying a three-game win streak into Sunday's season finale against the New Orleans Saints at Mercedes-Benz Stadium.



LIVING, C1

Area teen loved her 'Stranger Things' role

Atlanta resident Priah Ferguson had a blast playing Erica Sinclair on the series. "She stole every single scene she was in," show cocreator Matt Duffer says.



LIVING, C1

Saying a happy farewell to a few trends in 2025

Let's bid goodbye to a few things that went hard last year. To them we say: Don't follow us into the new year. You've had your 15 minutes. We're so over you.

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