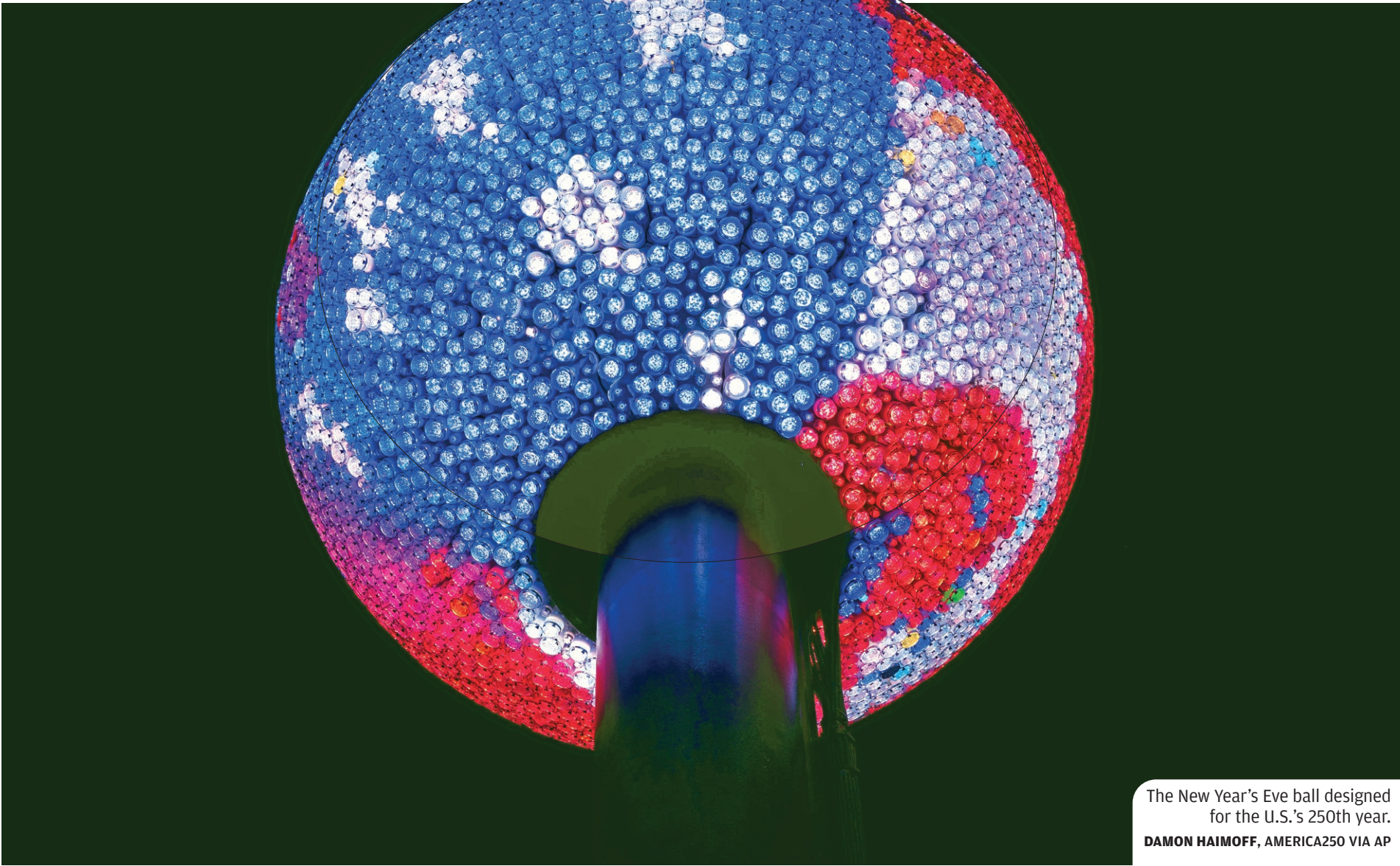


NEW YORK STATE

‘ONE FOR THE AGES’



The New Year's Eve ball designed for the U.S.'s 250th year.
DAMON HAIMOFF, AMERICA250 VIA AP

Times Square ball drop will kick off US's 250th birthday

SUSAN HAIGH
Associated Press

After the crystal ball drops on New Year's Eve in New York City, it will rise again, sparkling in red, white and blue to usher in 2026 and kick off months of celebrations for the nation's upcoming 250th birthday.

The patriotic touches at this year's Times Square gathering, including a second confetti drop, will offer an early glimpse of what's ahead: hundreds of events and programs, big and small, planned nationwide to mark the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

"I'm telling you right now, whatever you're imagining, it's going to be much more than that," said America250 Chair Rosie Rios, who oversees the bipartisan commission created by Congress in 2016 to organize the semiquincentennial anniversary. "It's going to be one for the ages, the most inspirational celebration this country and maybe the world has ever seen."

Rios and her group worked with the

Times Square Alliance business district and One Times Square, the building from where the ball is dropped, to make the changes to this year's ceremonies. They're also planning a second ball drop event on July 3, the eve of the nation's birthday, "in the same beautiful style that Times Square knows how to do it," Rios said.

It will mark the first time in 120 years there will be ball drop in Times Square that doesn't occur on New Year's Eve, she said.

A New Year's Eve ball was first dropped in Times Square in 1907. Built by a young immigrant metalworker named Jacob Starr, the 700-pound (318-kilogram), 5-foot-(1.5-meter-) diameter ball was made of iron and wood and featured 100 25-watt light bulbs. Last year, the Constellation Ball, the ninth and largest version, was unveiled. It measured about 12 feet (3.7 meters) in diameter and weighs nearly 12,000 pounds (5,400 kilograms).

The only years when no ball drop occurred were 1942 and 1943, when the city instituted a nightly "dimout" during World War II to protect itself from attacks. Crowds

instead celebrated the new year with a moment of silence followed by chimes rung from the base of One Times Square.

This year, the stroke of midnight will also mark the official launch of America Gives, a national service initiative created by America250. Organizers hope to make 2026 the largest year of volunteer hours ever aggregated in the country.

On the following day, America250 will participate in the New Years Day Rose Parade in Pasadena, California, with a float themed "Soaring Onward Together for 250 Years." It will feature three larger-than-life bald eagles representing the country's past, present and future.

"We want to ring in this new year from sea to shining sea. What better way to think about it than going from New York to California," Rios said. "This has to be community-driven, this has be grassroots. We're going from Guam to Alaska, from Fairbanks to Philadelphia, and everything in between."

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ECONOMY

New York minimum wage will increase in 2026

ROBERT HARDING
robert.harding@lee.net

The minimum wage in New York will increase on Jan. 1, 2026.

The minimum wage for New York City, Long Island and Westchester County workers will rise to \$17 an hour, while workers in most counties — including upstate — will get a raise to \$16 an hour.

At current levels, the minimum wage for downstate workers is \$16.50 an hour and \$15.50 for upstate workers.

The 50-cent increase is part of a multi-year plan to raise the minimum wage and index it to inflation. The increases began in 2024, when the minimum wage rose to

\$16 an hour in downstate areas and \$15 for the rest of the state.

This year, the minimum wage increased by 50 cents in each region. Beginning in 2027, the minimum wage will be indexed to inflation.

"From the tip of Montauk to Niagara Falls, this increase reflects our promise to put money back in New Yorkers pockets and uplift our hard workers," Gov. Kathy Hochul said in a statement. "By continuing these investments and indexing wages to inflation, we're making sure New Yorkers can keep up with rising costs by taking

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MARK LENNIHAN, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Minimum wage is going up in New York.