



Making a World of Difference

CURRENT ISSUES & EVENTS

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2025 • INVITATIONAL A

Dec. 1, 2024



Donald Trump. Susie Wiles. John Thune. ■ Pete Hegseth. Matt Gaetz. Elon Musk. ■ Photos by Gage Skidmore, Fox News and the White House

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UNIVERSITY INTERSCHOLASTIC LEAGUE

CURRENT ISSUES & EVENTS

INVITATIONAL A • 2025

- 1. “With the general election over, Texans are now looking ahead to the upcoming legislative session beginning in January,” Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick said in a November statement. While SB1 was, as it is traditionally, the budget bill, what was SB2 about to “underscore its importance”?**
 - a. property taxes
 - b. abortion
 - c. the border and immigration
 - d. school choice legislation
- 2. What should have been a weeklong test flight lasted more than eight months for a pair of astronauts who visited the International Space Station in June. NASA decided it was too risky to bring two astronauts back to Earth in a capsule manufactured by what company?**
 - a. SpaceX
 - b. Northrop Grumman
 - c. Boeing
 - d. Blue Origin
- 3. Diplomats and heads of state from nearly 200 countries gathered in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, in November for COP29 to discuss what?**
 - a. global climate initiatives, goals and action plans
 - b. public safety and security
 - c. school safety
 - d. improving education in less-developed countries
- 4. At the first debate against Vice President Kamala Harris, former President Donald J. Trump repeated a false claim that Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, have done what?**
 - a. failed to pay their taxes
 - b. built gangs that are running rampant and unchecked
 - c. abducted and ate their neighbors’ pets
 - d. been engaged in violent crime at a “startling” rate
- 5. During Ryan Seacrest’s first week of replacing longtime host Pat Sajak, fans argued that the new game show host was off to a rocky start. What show was Seacrest hosting?**
 - a. “American Idol”
 - b. “Jeopardy”
 - c. “The Price is Right”
 - d. “Wheel of Fortune”
- 6. To comply with Texas House Bill 18, which went into effect Sept. 18, what did social media company Meta do?**
 - a. rolled out parental control features that would allow parents to see and update their teens’ account settings
 - b. barred minors from creating any social media accounts unless their parents consented
 - c. stored the precise geolocation data associated with teen accounts and provided that data to parents when requested
 - d. filtered out material featuring self-harm, substance abuse, eating disorders or child pornography from the feeds of minors

7. **Mexico’s president put relations with the United States and Canadian embassies “on pause” in August after the two countries voiced concerns over what?**
 - a. drug trafficking
 - b. judicial overhaul
 - c. the border wall between the U.S. and Mexico
 - d. migrants traveling across Mexico

8. **Eight hundred people participated in this year’s hunt in Florida. The winner of the August challenge could win up to \$10,000 in prizes. It’s one of the ways that Florida is working to combat what invasive species?**
 - a. Tegu lizards
 - b. green iguana
 - c. rhesus macaque monkey
 - d. Burmese python

9. **Fans tracking flights, adoring crowds cheering for the motorcade, and the most awaited debut of the year: Washington’s VIPs arrived in mid-October. What 3-year-olds were scheduled to make their debut Jan. 24, 2025?**
 - a. Chilly Willy and Glacier, penguins
 - b. Bao Li and Qing Bao, pandas
 - c. Mosi and Hodari, giraffes
 - d. Baruti and Fahari, lions

10. **Adding abortion rights to the state constitution appeared on ballots in all of the states except which one?**
 - a. Arizona
 - b. Nebraska
 - c. Texas
 - d. Florida

11. **Texas loses about a farm a week. Our tomato production in the Valley is just about gone. What did Texas Agricultural Commissioner Sid Miller say was about to take center stage in Texas?**
 - a. water shortage
 - b. overpopulation
 - c. lack of affordable labor
 - d. invasion of feral swine

12. **Delegates referred to what island territory as “the next state of the United States” before casting their votes during the Democratic National Convention?**
 - a. Washington, D.C.
 - b. Guam
 - c. Puerto Rico
 - d. U.S. Virgin Islands

13. **Over what did Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton sue the City of Dallas and officials from the State Fair of Texas?**
 - a. a new policy of banning all firearms from the fairgrounds
 - b. a change in tax laws requiring the state to receive more of the revenue
 - c. food and ride inspections
 - d. the creation of a private, not-for-profit organization to run the fair

14. **What highly lauded FX series took home 18 Emmys, the most ever for a single season of television?**
 - a. “Fallout”
 - b. “The Bear”
 - c. “English Teacher”
 - d. “Shogun”

15. **According to ERCOT, on Sept. 8, 2024, Texas shattered its record, using 21,657 megawatts (40% of statewide demand) of what form of energy?**
 - a. wind
 - b. natural gas
 - c. solar
 - d. nuclear

16. **In the deadliest day since Lebanon’s civil war in 2006, 558 people died in that country in one day in late September. What country was responsible?**
 - a. Hezbollah
 - b. Syria
 - c. Israel
 - d. Iran

17. **On his or her most recent financial disclosure form, who reported a single gift: \$900 concert tickets from a German princess known for her links to conservative activists?**
 - a. Sharon Helman, director of the Phoenix Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care System
 - b. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito
 - c. U.S. Rep. Jamaal Bowman, D-New York
 - d. Joshua Kindred, judge, U.S. District Court of Alaska

18. **The U.S. announced sanctions against the state social media network RT — including the seizure of 32 internet domains aimed at interfering in the fall election. What country was behind RT?**
 - a. China
 - b. Iran
 - c. Russia
 - d. Saudi Arabia

19. **Hundreds of devices belonging to Hezbollah members exploded across Lebanon at the same time in late September. What were the devices?**
 - a. iPads
 - b. pagers
 - c. cellphones
 - d. door bells

20. **In the aftermath of elections the opposition claims he stole, four U.S. citizens were arrested by officials in which country over what officials claimed was a plot to assassinate President Nicolás Maduro?**
 - a. Venezuela
 - b. Panama
 - c. Sri Lanka
 - d. Mexico

21. **“If it were in my power, I would have already banned them in all schools in the state,” Texas Education Agency Commissioner Mike Morath said. What did he want to ban?**
- cellphones
 - portable computers
 - vaping devices
 - social media outlets
22. **In an effort to wean itself off fossil fuel 142 years after the world’s first power plant of this type began producing electricity, Britain closed down its last plant of what type in late September?**
- liquified natural gas
 - coal
 - rock oil
 - kerosene
23. **Making it the second-deadliest hurricane to hit the U.S. mainland in the past 55 years, the death toll from what hurricane was 232 people across six states?**
- Hurricane Katrina
 - Great Galveston Hurricane
 - Hurricane Andrew
 - Hurricane Helene
24. **A majority of the Supreme Court appeared sympathetic to the Biden administration’s restrictions on kits to make homemade guns that skirted background checks. Gun manufacturers and owners argued that the administration had overstepped its bounds in regulating what types of guns?**
- bump stocks
 - ghost guns
 - assault weapons
 - semiautomatic shotguns
25. **The oldest human on record, Jeanne Calment of France, lived to the age of 122. Barring a transformative medical breakthrough, according to research in the journal *Nature Aging*, the maximum life expectancy will end up around how many years?**
- 59.8 years
 - 77.5 years
 - 87 years
 - 125 years
26. **Just prior to last fall’s election, the unemployment rate dropped from 4.2% to 4.1%. The inflation rate also reflected a stronger economy down from its peak a little more than two years ago to what?**
- 0.16%
 - 2.4%
 - 5.5%
 - 9.1%
27. **The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration issued a severe geomagnetic storm warning Oct. 19. Expecting a K-index of 4, this storm resulted in what?**
- aurora that could be seen as far south as Texas, Arizona and Australia
 - massive power outages in major cities in Canada and northern Europe
 - disruption of through-the-air signals such as Wi-Fi 65 degrees Geomagnetic Latitude
 - alteration of plane routes avoiding the most northern latitudes

28. **An outbreak tied to the McDonald's Quarter Pounder sickened at least 75 people in 13 states, including a person who died, federal health officials said. The cause of the food poisoning, E. coli bacteria, was found in what?**
- lettuce
 - undercooked beef patties
 - raw clover sprouts
 - onions
29. **Some 8,000 soldiers planned to enter Russia near Ukraine's border and were preparing to help the Kremlin fight against Ukrainian troops. Where did those soldiers come from?**
- North Korea
 - Saudi Arabia
 - China
 - Moldova
30. **The federal government allocated \$2.6 billion from the 2021 infrastructure law for drinking water and wastewater improvements, recognizing that there is "no safe level" of what metal in drinking water?**
- Fluoride
 - Lead
 - Copper
 - Iron
31. **A hole that opens annually ranked as the seventh-smallest since recovery began in 1992, and it could fully recover by 2066. The hole is in what layer of the atmosphere?**
- Troposphere layer
 - Upper layer
 - Ozone layer
 - Outermost layer
32. **What two candidates engaged in a single televised debate of their Texas Senate race?**
- Sherrod Brown and Bernie Moreno
 - Ted Cruz and Colin Allred
 - Mike Rogers and Elissa Slotkin
 - Bob Casey and David McCormick
33. **The Federal Reserve made an unusually large move, a clear signal that central bankers think they are winning their war against inflation, in September. What?**
- Members cut interest rates by a quarter-point.
 - Members raised interest rates by a half-point.
 - Members cut the unemployment rate by a half-point.
 - Members cut interest rates by a half-point.
34. **Which Texas-based restaurant chain filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, citing a problematic capital structure and fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic?**
- Wing Stop
 - Jason's Deli
 - Taco Palenque
 - TGI Fridays

35. **After the abrupt closing of a facility in Chicago left 79 workers unemployed, what New York-based organization said in October that plant closings will impact 136 workers in Cincinnati; 131 in Chicago; 127 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; and fewer than 50 in Atlanta?**
- Boeing
 - Caterpillar
 - Amazon
 - PepsiCo
36. **A teenager was hospitalized in critical condition in what Canadian officials said was the country's first known case of what virus being transmitted to a human?**
- bird flu
 - measles
 - ebola
 - polio
37. **On the heels of a summer wave of COVID-19 cases, Americans will be able to get up to four COVID-19 nasal swab tests. How?**
- They can get the tests mailed to their homes.
 - They have to visit a doctor and get a prescription to pick them up at a pharmacy.
 - They can get them for free at any local Health and Human Services office.
 - They will be available at school nursing offices, university health centers and urgent care centers.
38. **They are native to the swamps and forests of West Africa, and there are fewer than 3,000 left in the wild. But the love for one of them, Moo Deng, has raised awareness for what animal?**
- panda
 - pygmy hippopotamus
 - giant penguin
 - Asian elephant
39. **Former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani lost a legal case and was forced to turn over his assets including his Manhattan (New York City) apartment, his Mercedes-Benz, 26 watches, other jewelry, furniture and various sports memorabilia. What legal case did he lose?**
- leaking classified documents regarding the U.S. military
 - falsifying business records in connection with a payoff to Stormy Daniels
 - spreading false information about voter fraud and pressuring then Vice President Mike Pence to toss out the election results
 - defaming and hurting the reputations of two Georgia election workers in the 2020 election
40. **As mounting losses, unaffordable debt, increased competition for bargain-seeking airline passengers and the inability to merge with other airlines left it little choice, which airline filed for bankruptcy in November?**
- American Airlines
 - Frontier Airlines
 - Spirit Airlines
 - JetBlue Airways

THE ESSAY

NOTE: *Contestants who do not write an essay will be disqualified.* Essay length is not a major grading factor as long as the essay is substantial and demonstrates a sincere effort to discuss the assigned topic. Cover as many corners of the issue as practical, including historical, political, economic, social and cultural, when relevant. Avoid including your personal opinions, as more than enough information on the subject has been published.

A focused, concise and specific essay beats a vague and rambling essay.

PROMPT

Without waiting for his inauguration on Jan. 20, 2025, President-elect Donald Trump unveiled the names of those who will make up his future administration. In the context of any general trends of Trump's appointments, discuss THREE of Trump's appointments; how each reflects his priorities during his second term in office; and the political, economic, social and cultural implications of each when relevant.

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ANSWER KEY

ESSAY PROMPT

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POTENTIAL DISCUSSION POINTS PREPARED Dec. 1, 2024 might include, but should not be limited to...

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| 1. D | 21. A |
| 2. C | 22. B |
| 3. A | 23. D |
| 4. C | 24. B |
| 5. D | 25. C |
| 6. A | 26. B |
| 7. B | 27. A |
| 8. D | 28. D |
| 9. B | 29. A |
| 10. C | 30. B |
| 11. A | 31. C |
| 12. C | 32. B |
| 13. A | 33. D |
| 14. D | 34. D |
| 15. C | 35. D |
| 16. C | 36. A |
| 17. B | 37. A |
| 18. C | 38. B |
| 19. B | 39. D |
| 20. A | 40. C |

- *Loyalty* — “Loyalty is everything,” summed up Steve Bannon, the president’s former special adviser, released from prison shortly before the election and now back as the incendiary host of the highly influential Bannon’s War Room podcast. The strategy was explained by the president-elect’s son Donald Trump Jr. on “Sunday Morning Futures” on Fox Business in mid-November. “The reality this time is, we actually know what we’re doing. We actually know who the good guys and the bad guys are. We know who the guys who are fake,” he said. “It’s about surrounding my father with people who are both competent and loyal. They will deliver on his promises. They will deliver on his message. They are not people who think they know better, as unelected bureaucrats.”
- *Recess appointments* — Trump has called on the Senate to cooperate with him to make recess appointments if the picks cannot be confirmed. Using such a move as a first resort rather than a final one, as has happened in the past, would be a sign that Trump, with a compliant GOP, plans to bypass the constitutional checks and balances of Congress and act with sweeping, unrestrained authority as president. The issue represents the first political crisis to confront South Dakota Sen. John Thune, who will take over as Republican Senate majority leader next year, completing a momentous shift in their leadership that elevates a top deputy of Mitch McConnell into a key position. Texas Sen. John Cornyn lost his bid to be Senate majority leader after the other Texas senator, Ted Cruz, voted for Thune.
- *First female chief of staff* — Susie Wiles, his election campaign chief, became Trump’s first appointment when she was unveiled as his chief of staff, as widely expected. Wiles enjoys wide support inside the Trump team and was notably called on stage by the incoming president during his victory speech. “Susie is tough, smart, innovative, and is universally admired and respected,” Trump said of the steely 67-year-old Florida native, who will be the first-ever woman to take the high-profile post.
- *Attorney general* — Trump named ultra-loyalist and firebrand Florida representative Matt Gaetz to help fight what Trump calls a “weaponized government.” Trump’s pick of Gaetz quickly set off alarm bells among former Justice Department officials and some congressional Republicans who view him as unfit due to ethical and legal problems that for years have dogged Gaetz. Before Trump was sworn in, Gaetz backed out saying he didn’t want to be a distraction. Then Trump nominated Trump loyalist and veteran prosecutor Pam Bondi as his new pick for attorney general. Bondi has a long track record in law enforcement and previously served as Florida’s attorney general.
- *Department of Health and Human Services* — Some senior medical experts are raising concerns over the qualifications of Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a vaccine skeptic, to safeguard generations of medical advances as the secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, even though his outspokenness against processed food has found support among many top physicians.
- *Defense Secretary* — CNN reported that Pete Hegseth, Trump’s pick for defense secretary, paid a woman who accused him of sexual assault in a settlement agreement that included a confidentiality clause, according to Hegseth’s attorney. The Fox News anchor has denied assaulting the woman, according to the attorney, and was not charged in any criminal case or named as a defendant in any civil lawsuit in connection with the 2017 incident.
- *Department of Government Efficiency* — Billionaire Elon Musk has been tasked with leading incoming President Donald Trump’s new Department of Government Efficiency. In a statement on social media, the president-elect said Musk — along with former Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy — would “dismantle government bureaucracy, slash excess regulations, cut wasteful expenditures and restructure federal agencies.” Ramaswamy, meanwhile, has put forward plans to scrap a number of federal departments, including the Department of Education, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Internal Revenue Service and the FBI. Musk, the Tesla and SpaceX billionaire who has become Trump’s “first buddy,” appeared at Trump’s side for days after the election to the frustration of some elected officials. Only Congress can create a new federal agency so DOGE immediately raised questions: If this is an outside commission, how is it funded? If it’s taxpayer funded, how does that work? And how big is it? If it’s somehow, maybe, funded from outside of government, wouldn’t there be conflicts of interest?