Sundance made Park City the 'it' town. Not anymore

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ALEX GOODLETT NYT

A crowd walks down Main Street during Sundance in Park City, Utah, Jan. 25. The nonprofit behind Sundance, the pre-eminent festival for independent film held for the past 40 years in Park City, Utah, is exploring where else to hold the event in 2027 and beyond.

PARK CITY, UTAH

Amid all the talk of films, fires and the state of the Oscar race, one question has dominated Sundance 2025: Where will the festival move?

In April, the nonprofit behind Sundance, the preeminent festival for independent film held for the past 40 years in Park City, Utah, announced that it was exploring where else to hold the event in 2027 and beyond. The organizers then narrowed their choices to three spots: Salt Lake City, just 45 minutes away, along with a smaller presence in Park City; Boulder, Colorado; and Cincinnati. The final choice is expected to be announced in late March or early April.

That has left festivalgoers, industry insiders and locals imagining what the change would mean for the city and the festival itself.

The organizers have said, essentially, that the event has gotten too big for Park City. When Sundance arrives every January, it balloons the ski town of 8,200 full-time residents into a snowy circus, with more than 20,000 people streaming in from around the world. Hotel prices skyrocket, the streets become clogged with black SUVs, and what should be a simple five-minute ride down Main Street can turn into a 30-minute crawl, especially when it snows, as it has at this year's festival.

The organizers have said they are looking for a new home that can house the growing festival while maintaining its roots.

Sundance representatives declined to comment for this article. But nearly everyone in Park City for this year's event, which runs through the weekend, seems to have an opinion on the change. Some question whether coastal elites who trek to Utah would travel to Cincinnati in January. Others ask whether Boulder has the infrastructure to support a growing festival. And still more wonder if Sundance should be contemplating Utah or Ohio at all, considering the states' conservative political leanings don't align with Sundance's commitment to celebrating diverse voices in an inclusive environment.

For Park City's full-time residents, many of whom have grown up with the film festival, the idea of it leaving seems unimaginable.

"It's heartbreaking," said Ryan Williams, 37, an art dealer in town and the son of a former mayor. "Park City is not the most diverse place, not just in skin color but also in thought. And the thing that happens during Sundance is people are open, they are ready to connect and there's this magic. We have people from all over the world here: different colors, different cultures. It's this beautiful gift that we're given each year."

Sundance has a significant effect on the Utah economy. Out-of-state visitors spent $106.4 million with the total economic impact reaching $132 million, according to a report released by the festival after last year's 10-day event. That impact included 1,730 jobs for Utah residents.

Many locals are still holding out hope that Sundance chooses the Salt Lake City option, because Park City would still hold some ancillary events. That could be why some local groups, such as Park City Chamber of Commerce, declined to comment on any possible move before a decision has been made.

Not everyone in Park City is upset about the festival leaving town. Blaire Isleib, 42, the co-owner of Flight, a women's boutique on Main Street, said Sundance no longer brought in additional sales for her store, in part because her front door is often being blocked by big trucks that clog the main street while they load in the pop-up shops that operate on the street for the week. That extra traffic keeps local patrons and the ski tourists away. The Sundance folks? Not big retail shoppers.

"It's definitely not our moneymaking time anymore," she said.

It is a big moneymaker for Hudson Valeriano, the owner of Rio Transportation, a car service offering luxury rides to people headed to Park City. The loss of Sundance would mean an annual 30% decline in business, he said. During the festival his fleet of seven SUVs is constantly in motion, with clients often booking his drivers all day long, to shuttle them from event to event. (When Sundance isn't in season, the majority of his business is hauling people between the ski town and the Salt Lake City airport.)

"We're going to have to change the style of the company," he said, adding that he intends to focus it more on the ski tourists, which he believes will offset the 30% loss by about 10%.

For Meagan Nash, a restaurateur and caterer, the loss of Sundance in Park City will be a significant hit to her revenue. Nash, 43, opened her restaurant Handle with her partners in 2014, after spending a few years catering for various Sundance events. The first weekend of this year's festival was packed with special events -- she counted at least eight private meals, hosting various production companies and media brands.

And while it isn't her biggest month of the year -- that's March, when the weather warms and families descend for spring break -- the revenue generated by Sundance boosts her business during an otherwise slow period.

"Sundance, literally, has been here my whole entire life," said Nash, who was born and raised in Utah. "It would be a massive bummer if it went to a different city. I don't know if it would ever be the same."



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President Donald Trump is forcing out top leaders of the National Labor Relations Board, ushering in a swift reboot of workplace law enforcement while testing the limits of presidential authority.

Labor board leaders who backed broad worker rights ousted

BY JOSH EIDELSON
Bloomberg News

President Donald Trump is forcing out top leaders of the U.S. labor board, ushering in a swift reboot of workplace law enforcement while testing the limits of presidential authority.

Jennifer Abruzzo, the general counsel of the National Labor Relations Board, said she was fired via email late on Monday. Gwynne Wilcox, who was one of the labor board's two Democratic members, said she was ousted, too.

"As the first Black woman board member, I brought a unique perspective that I believe will be lost upon my unprecedented and illegal removal," Wilcox said in a statement. "I will be pursuing all legal avenues to challenge my removal, which violates long-standing Supreme Court precedent."

The NLRB general counsel has sweeping authority to determine what sorts of cases are prosecuted by the agency, which is responsible for enforcing most private sector U.S. employees' right to unionize or take collective action to improve their working conditions. Trump's NLRB general counsel during his first term, former management-side attorney Peter Robb, used that authority to turn away cases brought by Uber Technologies Inc. drivers, arguing they did not meet the criteria to be employees protected by federal labor law.

Abruzzo, one of President Joe Biden's most hard-charging appointees, brought an unusually expansive view of workers' legal rights. She brought cases trying to restrict companies from banning "Black Lives Matter" insignia, imposing noncompete clauses and holding mandatory anti-union meetings. Her approach drew criticism from business groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which accused her of "blatantly unlawful overreach."

Wilcox was the NLRB's chair for the final days of the Biden Administration. NLRB members have the authority to issue regulations and rule on appeals in the cases the general counsel prosecutes. Unlike the general counsel, federal law states that NLRB members can only be fired for neglect or malfeasance, and so terminating one could spur legal challenges to future agency rulings. Businesses, including Trump ally Elon Musk's SpaceX, have recently argued that the restriction on firing NLRB members is unconstitutional.

White House officials didn't immediately respond to a request for comment sent after normal business hours.

The firings are among the latest efforts by Trump to remove top federal officials since taking office about a week ago. In that time he has dismissed several independent inspectors general at various federal agencies as well as prosecutors associated with an independent counsel probe into his actions during and after his first term.

While Abruzzo's term was slated to last until July, her ouster by Trump was widely expected following Biden's firing of Robb on Inauguration Day four years ago. The move clears the way for the new president to install a top NLRB attorney who may take a much more business-friendly approach to the role. Trump's choice could determine what happens to the agency's efforts to hold Amazon.com Inc. and Alphabet Inc. liable for the treatment of subcontracted staff who the companies claim are not their employees.

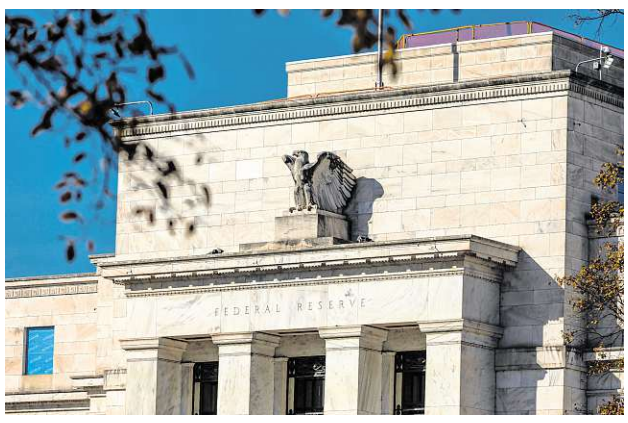
Firing Wilcox was less expected, particularly given that there were already enough vacant seats on the board for Trump to install a Republican majority in the coming months. More management-friendly board members could overturn Biden-era precedents that made it easier to unionize and harder to fire protesting workers.

Trump argued on the campaign trail that he would be a better friend to union members than Biden. His pick to lead the Department of Labor, Rep. Lori Chavez-DeRemer, is an unusually pro-union Republican former member of Congress whose candidacy was pushed by the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

But the Labor Department is a separate agency from the NLRB. During Trump's first term, he filled key roles at both agencies with business allies who pushed changes giving companies more power over workers.

Fed holds rates steady, hitting pause after series of cuts

BY COLBY SMITH
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The Federal Reserve leaders decided to stand pat at their first gathering of 2025, pressing pause on interest rate cuts as policymakers take stock of how the world's largest economy is faring.

WASHINGTON

The Federal Reserve left interest rates unchanged Wednesday, as the central bank turned cautious on further cuts amid a strong economy and uncertainty about inflation.

The central bank's decision to pause at its first meeting of 2025 followed a series of cuts that began in September to account for progress already made on getting inflation down.

Over the course of three meetings, the Fed lowered rates by a full percentage point to a range of 4.25% to 4.5%, which was maintained Wednesday.

Speaking at a news conference Wednesday, Fed chair Jerome Powell signaled his support for additional cuts eventually, but was clear that "strong" growth and a "solid" labor market meant the central bank could take its time.

Inflation concerns continued to dominate, however, with the Fed scrapping earlier guidance about the progress made in achieving the central bank's 2% inflation goal. Rather, it said that inflation remained "somewhat elevated."

Officials at the Fed are trying to strike the right balance between ensuring that high inflation is fully vanquished after the worst shock in decades while also safeguarding the labor market from weakening excessively. Lowering interest rates too slowly risks jeopardizing jobs, whereas lowering interest rates too quickly risks inflation getting stuck above the Fed's 2% goal.

Angst about the labor market that emerged over the summer has abated as businesses continue to hire and layoffs remain low. But progress on taming price pressures has been bumpy in recent months. The concern is that it may get even bumpier given President Donald Trump's plans to dramatically reshape economic policy in his second term in the White House, including through a much more liberal use of tariffs and mass deportations.

What is unclear is how those policies will affect inflation and growth and in turn when and by how much the Fed will be able to lower interest rates again.

In December, officials scaled back their forecasts for rate cuts for this year to just half a percentage point – half of what they estimated in September – as they sharply raised their inflation projections for the year. That reflected potential policy changes from Trump for some officials, Powell said at the time, while others revised their outlooks based on the state of the economy alone.

Key to how the Fed will respond to price pressures caused by tariffs, for example, is how expectations from consumers and businesses about future inflation shift as a result. The central bank proved to be more concerned about the potential hit to growth caused by trade tensions during Trump's first term – so much so that it lowered interest rates – but that was because inflation was consistently below not above its goal as it is today.

Trump's top economic advisers, including newly confirmed Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, have pushed back on the idea that tariffs will cause higher consumer prices on the grounds that increased costs to U.S. importers would in part be offset by a stronger dollar. Bessent also expects foreign manufacturers to slash prices in order to stay competitive with U.S. firms, which would further insulate consumers.

Trump has made squashing inflation a central pillar of his economic agenda, and said last week that as his policies lower oil prices, he would "demand that interest rates drop immediately."

Trump repeatedly attacked Powell during his first term for failing to lower interest rates fast enough. At one point, he questioned if the Fed chair was a "bigger enemy" to the U.S. than China's President Xi Jinping.

Speaking at a New York Times event in December, Powell said he was "not concerned" about the Fed maintaining its political independence.