

# Times Square to feature patriotic crystal ball drop to kick off US' 250th birthday

BY 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 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."

President Donald Trump has also announced the "Freedom 250" initiative to coordinate additional events for the 250th anniversary.

Rios said she sees the wide range of celebrations and programs planned for the coming months, from large fireworks displays and statewide potluck suppers to student contests and citizen oral histories, as an opportunity to unite a politically divided nation.

"If we can find something for everyone ... having those menus of options that people can pick and choose how they want to participate," she said. "That's how we're going to get to engaging 350 million Americans."



KODEE BRINEGAR/The News-Enterprise, file

**Elected officials, Vine Grove city employees, city council members and mayor toss dirt May 21 during a groundbreaking ceremony on the Vine Grove Wastewater Treatment Plant renovation project. The renovations are expected to be finished in the fall of 2026, according to Vine Grove Mayor Pam Ogden.**



KODEE BRINEGAR/The News-Enterprise, file

**Kentaro Hall, right, and Corey Burch check the tools and equipment on the new Vine Grove Fire Department firetruck as part of their daily task as the city's new full-time firefighters. They were both hired in February.**

# Federal judge to hold hearing on whether Abrego Garcia is being vindictively prosecuted

BY JESSE BEDAYN  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

A federal judge this week canceled the trial of Kilmar Abrego Garcia, the Salvadoran man who was mistakenly deported, and scheduled a hearing on whether the prosecution is being vindictive in pursuing a human smuggling case against him.

Abrego Garcia has become a centerpiece of the debate over immigration after the Trump administration deported him in March to a notorious prison in El Salvador. Facing mounting public pressure and a court order, the Trump administration brought him back to the U.S. in June, but only after issuing an arrest warrant on human smuggling charges in Tennessee.

Abrego Garcia has denied the allegations, and argued that prosecutors are vindictively and selectively targeting him. Judge Waverly D. Crenshaw, Jr. wrote in Tuesday's order that Abrego Garcia had enough evidence to hold a hearing on the topic, which Crenshaw scheduled for Jan. 28.

At that hearing, prosecutors will have to explain their reasoning for charging Abrego Garcia, Crenshaw wrote, and if they fail in that, the charges could be dismissed.



Stephanie Scarbrough/AP photo

**Kilmar Abrego Garcia arrives at the United States District Court District of Maryland, Monday, Dec. 22 in Greenbelt, Md.**

When Abrego Garcia was pulled over in 2022, there were nine passengers in the car, and the officers discussed among themselves their suspicions of smuggling. However, Abrego Garcia was eventually allowed to continue driving with only a warning.

A Department of Homeland Security agent previously testified that he did not begin investigating the traffic stop until after the U.S. Supreme Court said in April that the Trump administration had to work to bring Abrego Garcia from El Salvador, where he was deported.

Years earlier, Abrego Garcia had been granted protection from deportation to his home country after a

judge found he faced danger there from a gang that targeted his family. That order allowed Abrego Garcia, who has an American wife and child, to live and work in the U.S. under Immigration and Customs Enforcement supervision.

Members of President Donald Trump's administration have accused Abrego Garcia of being a member of the MS-13 gang, but he has vehemently denied the accusations and has no criminal record.

Abrego Garcia's defense attorney and the U.S. attorney's office in Nashville did not immediately respond to requests for comment.



GINA CLEAR/The News-Enterprise, file

**The remains of an antique 1941 Howe engine, an operational pumper truck and a brush utility truck are seen Aug. 20 after a fire broke out after 2 a.m. at the Vine Grove Fire Department building on North Mill Street.**

## VINE

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wastewater treatment plant, upgrading our water system and revitalizing our downtown," Ogden said.

With one of the fastest-growing residential infrastructures, Ogden said she is always about the growth that is to come in the next year.

"I'm always excited to see how much growth we have and just the different things that happen in the city," Ogden said. "Vine Grove continues to move forward because of the dedication of our employees, businesses, and residents. Together, we are building a stronger, safer, and more vibrant city, and I look forward to continuing this momentum into the year ahead."

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## JURY

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saw the photos of the body cam (footage), there was no basketball."

Logsdon argued that Harris tried to flee the scene. Adding if Harris did nothing wrong, why not stay and talk to police about it.

"Don't run from it. Only the guilty flee. If he did nothing wrong, why does he have to ask someone not to come up and testify? That's a guilty conscious," Logsdon said. "If there was no ill will between these families, then what is the motivation for this child to lie and make this at midnight or 1 a.m. in the morning when everyone else is asleep except for her and Harris?"

Whether or not the parent's bedroom door was shut, Logsdon said that (the victim) busted

through their door to tell them that a guy was in her room, 'being weird and being a weirdo,'" Logsdon said. "Absolutely he was being a weirdo. You don't walk into a little girl's room in the middle of the night and (commit sexual acts)."

This case is about credibility, Logsdon said.

According to Shiffman, (the victim) even told her parents that there was a toiletries bag that indicated that Harris stayed at the house but it was not mentioned or handed over to police.

"I believe that when Logsdon comes before you, she might argue that the fact that Harris left or tried to leave which shows some circumstantial evidence that he is guilty of something," Shiffman said. "Tim also testified that he contemplated grabbing his pistol in that moment. There was a confrontation and a heated

argument between them. Who wouldn't want to leave and try and diffuse the situation?"

Logsdon asked the jurors who they believed was telling the truth? Harris or the victim, who had no reason to lie about the situation.

"Do you believe this child that cried out to her parents that there was a weirdo in her bedroom doing things he shouldn't be doing or do you believe she was making this up? Sometimes children lie, but grownups can lie too," Logsdon said. "Children lie the same reasons grownups lie, to get out of trouble. Children would lie about small things. Children lie so that they will not be punished, not so that they will be."

Logsdon urged the jurors to see the child had no reason to lie. Claiming that she had to endure many hardships, including talk to strangers, from

lawyers to police officers, about what happened to her that night.

"Think about all of that and then tell me why a child would lie? What is the motivation, to get attention? There has been zero testimony about there being any animosity between these two families," Logsdon said. "Do not concern yourself with why a child should lie; you should be amazed that this sex crime was ever reported in the first place."

"In this case, I believe it would have been needed to prove beyond a reasonable doubt," Shiffman said. "We need more than one witness testimony to say that a crime actually occurred."

The things that the defense has mentioned in closing arguments are red herrings meant to distract jurors, Logsdon said.

"Your job is to judge the credibility of each and

every witness here. Sometimes people can get details wrong. If you ask a child what they got for Christmas last year, they might say they got an Xbox or something big but they couldn't tell you what day of the week it was or what time they went over to grandma's house," Logsdon said. "Children remember the details that make an impression on them. An impression was made upon by a weirdo in her room that night."

The victim is a child and did exactly what she should have done, Logsdon said and that she told her parents.

"She had to fake being sick to run out of the room, run to her parent's room, and tell them what happened. She was still visibly shaken when the police got there," Logsdon said. "She has absolutely nothing to gain, no reward, no benefit, no gain. In fact, she's lost a lot by doing

what she was supposed to do. She lost her privacy and her dignity."

Logsdon asked that the jurors use their commonsense to make their determination and find Harris guilty.

"Your job is to be truth seekers and find the truth. Justice is something that is for everyone under the constitution and that includes victims of crime, even children," Logsdon said. "The child deserves justice from our court system and that includes the right to be believed in. She might not be old enough to vote, but she has the right to be believed."

It is more than a he said, she said case, Logsdon said.

"I would submit that Harris is no longer cloaked in innocence," Logsdon said.

Harris will return to court 10 a.m. Feb. 3 for formal sentencing.