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The Desert Sun

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New Senate leader faces test with Trump

Thune's first task will be overseeing confirmations

David Morgan
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – Incoming U.S. Senate Republican leader John Thune will face the test of his career when Donald Trump returns to power next month, as he aims to shepherd the new president's priorities through Congress while pro-

tecting his chamber's authority over Cabinet picks and spending.

A 20-year Senate veteran, the 63-year-old South Dakotan is known as an affable negotiator skilled at finding common ground between opposing factions. He'll step up as majority leader on Jan. 3, when his party's new 53-47 majority is sworn in.

Thune will have to maintain a positive relationship with a sometimes petulant and unpredictable Trump who once sought his ouster and who has dis-

played little interest in the Senate's role as a check on executive power.

He'll be charged with overseeing the confirmation of a series of norm-shattering Cabinet nominees; delivering on Trump's agenda of tax cuts, border security and energy deregulation, and averting a potential U.S. default on its more than \$36 trillion in debt sometime next year.

"He's entering the majority leader position during one of the most contentious and consequential years the Sen-

ate has had in a generation," said Brian Riedl, a former Senate aide who is now a senior fellow at the right-leaning Manhattan Institute. "It's really going to be a trial by fire."

Thune's first task will be overseeing confirmation hearings for controversial Trump Cabinet picks including Pete Hegseth for defense secretary, Tulsi Gabbard for national intelligence director, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as health and

See LEADER, Page 2A

BABY BIRD



Coachella Valley Firebirds fan Michael Gerano holds his 8-month-old daughter Naomi during the first period against Calgary Wranglers at Acrisure Arena in Palm Desert on Sunday. The Firebirds return home to face San Jose at 7 p.m., Wednesday. The Firebirds return home to face San Jose at 7 p.m., Wednesday. See more on Sunday's game in sports on Page 1B. TAYA GRAY/THE DESERT SUN

Desert nonprofit named PGA Tour Charity of the Year

Larry Bohannon
Palm Springs Desert Sun
USA TODAY NETWORK

Peter Sturgeon understands the non-profit world of the PGA Tour and how many charities are funded by PGA Tour events. That's why he said it was so shocking that the Palm Desert-based The Ophelia Project is being named the PGA Tour's 2024 Charity of the Year.

"We know we do good work, but we also know there are 44 tour events around Canada and the U.S., and they have non-profits in all of those communities," said Sturgeon, president and CEO of The Ophelia project, part of the John F. Kennedy Memorial Foundation. "It was really quite staggering and an affirmation to our 80 mentors who come alongside these young ladies and help them and support them."

One of 16 charities funded by The American Express PGA Tour event in La Quinta at a charity distribution breakfast last month, the award from the PGA Tour brings an additional \$30,000 to The Ophelia Project.

The Ophelia Project is a five-year mentoring program that provides a supportive environment, training and education for 300 to 400 girls annually in grades 8 through 12. The goal of The Ophelia Project and its volunteers is to help girls stay in school, develop positive values, increase self-esteem, graduate high school on time with college or career plans and pursue paths to a brighter future.

Based in Palm Desert since 2014, The Ophelia Project says 7,000 girls have completed the program, achieving a 100% graduation rate.

"It's exceeding gratifying knowing that we represent thousands of non-profits that the tour gets to help throughout the golf season," Sturgeon said. "So to be recognized this way is truly an amazing honor. We are a small, local non-profit. We have a big name under the John F. Kennedy Memorial Foundation, but we are just a small non-profit trying to strengthen communities by strengthening young girls."

Impact Through Golf, The American Express golf tournament's charitable

See NON-PROFIT, Page 2A

Pradetto sworn into Palm Desert City Council

Tom Coulter
Palm Springs Desert Sun
USA TODAY NETWORK

A new member was sworn into the Palm Desert City Council on Thursday, while long-time Councilmember Kathleen Kelly thanked her colleagues and the city's residents as she bid farewell in her final meeting.

Joe Pradetto, who previously chaired



Pradetto

Pradetto, who works as the director

Palm Desert's planning commission, joined the council as the new representative of District 2, which covers the city's south end. He won election with about 44% of the vote, while Kelly finished with 33% and another challenger, Gregg Akkerman, finished with 23%.

Pradetto, who works as the director

of governmental affairs for the city of Yucaipa, thanked his supporters after taking his seat at the dais.

"I ran to make a difference, so I hope to exchange this moment of fleeting popularity for an enduring legacy of good sense, honesty and effectiveness," Pradetto said. "Let's get to work."

See PRADETTO, Page 4A

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CALIFORNIA LOTTERY

Mega Millions/Friday	
Numbers	36,43,52,58,65
Meganumber	16
Jackpot	\$740 million
Tuesday's jackpot estimate (drawing: 7:57 p.m.)	\$695 million

SuperLotto Plus/Saturday	
Numbers	9,10,17,33,45
Meganumber	8
Jackpot	\$8 million
Wednesday's jackpot estimate (drawing: 7:57 p.m.)	\$7 million

Powerball/Monday
 Monday's draw occurred past press time.
 Look for Monday's numbers in the Wednesday paper.

Lottery information: Riverside offices: (800) 568-8379
 On the Web: www.calottery.com.

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Tuesday, Dec. 17, the 352nd day of 2024. There are 14 days left in the year. On this date in:

1777: France acknowledged the independence of the United States, which led officials from both nations to sign the Treaty of Alliance, as well as the Treaty of Amity and Commerce on Feb. 6, 1778.

1892: Vogue magazine founder and editor Arthur Baldwin Turnure published the first issue covering New York's social elite and arts. Condé Nast Publications bought the magazine in 1909.

1903: The Ohio-born Wright brothers, Wilbur and Orville, made the world's first successful pilot-controlled flights of an engine-powered aircraft. Orville's first flight made it about 120 feet over 12 seconds on a beach in Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina. Wilbur flew about 850 feet, remaining airborne for nearly a minute, on their fourth flight there that day.

1933: At Wrigley Field, the Chicago Bears beat the New York Giants in the first National Football League title game.

1936: Pope Francis, the first Jesuit pope, was born Jorge Bergoglio in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Near his 33rd birthday, he was ordained a Roman Catholic priest. He'd become an archbishop in 1998, and in 2001, Pope John Paul II made him a cardinal. After Pope Benedict XVI died at the end of 2022, the College of Cardinals elected Bergoglio, 76, who took the name Francis in respect for St. Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Franciscan order.

1951: Members of the Civil Rights Congress, a left-wing activist group affiliated with the Communist Party, dually delivered a petition, "We Charge Genocide," to the United Nations headquarters in New York and a U.N. meeting in Paris. The petition cited international law in requesting the U.N. bring accountability to the U.S. It also documented hundreds of recent killings and other hate crimes, claiming federal, state and local government inaction was

complicit to a mass conspiracy of genocide against thousands of Black American citizens who had been lynched after slavery was abolished. The report also noted poll taxes and literacy tests in some states were used to disenfranchise Black voters, as well as inequalities from "the willful creation of conditions making for premature death, poverty and disease."

1957: A milestone of America's intercontinental ballistic missile program, the U.S. launched its first fully successful test of an Atlas ICBM rocket from Cape Canaveral, Florida.

1979: President Jimmy Carter was the first to light the National Menorah, which became an annual event to celebrate Hanukkah. The first event was in Lafayette Park across the street from the White House, but the location was moved to the Ellipse in 1987.

1989: Fox first aired "The Simpsons" premiering its three-season stint of short, animated cartoons on the Fox variety program, "The Tracey Ullman Show." The antics of Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa and Maggie Simpson, along with many other characters in the fictional town of Springfield, led to "The Simpsons" holding multiple prime-time TV longevity records.

2012: For the second straight year, Billboard named Adele as Artist of the Year after her album, "21," spent the most weeks at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 sales chart during both years.

2014: More than a half century after the U.S. failed in its attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro's regime in Cuba, the two nations temporarily reestablished diplomatic relations severed amid the Cold War.

2020: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported the nation's highest recorded number of drug overdose deaths over a 12-month period that ended in May 2020 - over 81,000 people. Fatal overdoses involving synthetic opioids (primarily fentanyl) spiked 38%, while methamphetamines shot up 35% and cocaine (some mixed with fentanyl or heroin) increased 27%.

Non-profit

Continued from Page 1A

foundation, announced the PGA Tour honor Thursday.

Sturgeon was also selected to participate in the 2024 American Express Leadership Academy for nonprofit leaders who are changemakers in their sector and have the potential to innovate and enhance their organization's work.

"To have one of our local nonprofits chosen by the PGA Tour as its Charity of the Year is incredibly fulfilling and inspiring," said Frank Marzano, chairman of the Impact Through Golf Foundation. "When the board and I met with some of the young women The Ophelia Project has supported, we were moved by their stories of resilience and success as a result of their mentorship experience. The Ophelia Project has made a significant impact on this community through its efforts to empower and support young girls, and this national recognition validates the importance of its work here in the

Coachella Valley."

While the announcement was made Thursday, the Impact Through Golf Foundation actually informed Sturgeon of the award at the charity breakfast in November at La Quinta Country Club, where PGA Tour personnel and cameras recorded an upcoming broadcast segment for the charity.

The Ophelia Project was one of the desert charities that received funds from Impact Through Golf for 2024. The foundation handed out \$1,050,000, with the tournament distributing more than \$66 million since the event debuted in 1960. Funds go to valley-based nonprofit organizations focused on health and wellness, education, youth and family support, aiding those experiencing homelessness, DEI and capital improvement.

For more information about The Ophelia Project, visit <http://jfkfoundation.org>

The 66th annual The American Express will take place Jan. 16-19 at PGA West and La Quinta Country Club. Tickets are now on sale at the tournament's official website, www.theamexgolf.com/.

Leader

Continued from Page 1A

human services secretary and Kash Patel as FBI director.

Members of Thune's conference have expressed quiet concern about all four, whose resumes are unlike those of prior candidates for the powerful jobs. Since one Trump pick, former congressman Matt Gaetz, dropped out of the running for attorney general, Trump allies have stepped up pressure on Senate Republicans to get in line behind his other nominees.

Thune for weeks avoided weighing on the candidates' qualifications, simply saying that each candidate will have to answer questions at a public hearing and then face a Senate confirmation vote. Some Trump supporters say that stance is not firm enough for their tastes.

"The Senate majority leader's job is to ensure that qualified cabinet nominees of his president's party win confirmation," said Mike Davis, a former Senate Republican aide who is founder and president of the Article III Project.

Davis said his Trump-aligned advocacy group has already directed tens of thousands of people to call and email wavering Senate Republicans and "light them up" on social media.

"If those qualified nominees fail, that is John Thune's failure," Davis said.

Thune sounded a deferential note on Trump nominees in a Fox News interview last week, saying, "I give wide latitude and wide deference to the president when he makes these selections. We have a job to do, advice and consent, and we will do it and make sure that there's a process that's fair."

Thune has survived one pressure campaign by members of Trump's "Make American Great Again" movement, who had wanted Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., as the chamber's leader instead.

That victory came in a secret ballot vote held behind closed doors, but the Cabinet votes will be held publicly in the Senate chamber.

'An institutionalist at heart'

Thune, whose current six-year term extends through 2028, has strong support in South Dakota, which insulated him against Trump's hopes of putting up a primary challenger against him in 2022 after he criticized Trump's attempt to overturn the 2020 presidential election.

He has said he plans to protect the Senate's power and traditions, which include both the authority to confirm or deny a president's Cabinet picks and its filibuster rule, which requires 60 of the 100 senators to agree on most legislation - meaning that he may at times need Democratic support.

"The Senate is here by design to be a place where things slow down, to be more deliberative and give voice to the minority," Thune told reporters this



Incoming U.S. Senate Republican leader John Thune of South Dakota said he plans to protect the Senate's power and traditions, which include both the authority to confirm or deny a president's Cabinet picks and its filibuster rule.

ELIZABETH FRANTZ/REUTERS FILE

month. "Obviously, as we've said before, the filibuster is non-negotiable."

Trump, in an interview with Time magazine published last week, said he has "respect" for the filibuster and "a very good relationship" with Thune.

Thune entered the Senate in 2005 with the reputation of a giant slayer, after unseating then-Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, who had led the chamber's Democrats for the previous decade.

Daschle voiced respect for Thune in an interview.

"I have confidence in John Thune," Daschle said. "He's an institutionalist at heart."

Thune's allies say the former high school basketball star has the acumen to outmaneuver lawmakers unwilling to toe the party line on critical votes. That's a skill that both Thune and his House of Representatives counterpart, Republican Speaker Mike Johnson, who will start the year with a narrow 217-215 majority, will need next year.

"What you see in him occasionally is the competitive athlete. It's the same sort of spirit," Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., told reporters. "I suspect he has pretty sharp elbows on the basketball court."

Trump, and his supporters, may expect no less - and seem poised to push back if some Senate Republicans try to buck his priorities. Trump has already suggested he would turn to recess appointments to install nominees if the Senate doesn't support his picks.

"All are highly qualified men and women who have the talent, experience and necessary skill sets to Make America Great Again, and we expect members of the Senate will recognize that during the confirmation process," Trump-Vance Transition spokesperson Colton Snedecor said in a statement.

Philip Wallach, a senior fellow at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, said Thune may face pressure from hard-line conservatives with no interest in the Senate's traditions. "There's an awful lot of folks going into the new administration who just think of Congress as a pain in the butt."

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