

Your say in Forum: What are your thoughts on ICE?

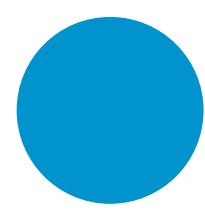
Some say immigration tactics are shameful. Others say agency is doing its job. **In Opinion**

What's a 'comfortable' life? The definition is changing

New report suggests expectations of traditional middle-class life are being challenged. **In Money**

Jordan Stoltz looks to nab 3rd Olympic gold medal

For the second race in a row, speed skater made Games history. This time, it was the men's 500 meters. **More coverage from Milan in Sports**

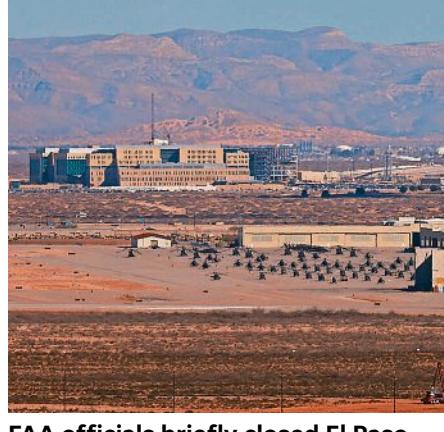


USA TODAY

THE NATION'S NEWS | \$3 | MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2026



KATIE STRATMAN/IMAGN IMAGES



FAA officials briefly closed El Paso International Airport in Texas on Feb. 10. JOSE LUIS GONZALEZ/REUTERS

Some details emerge over closure at Texas airport

CBP's firing of laser led to FAA safety concerns

Cybele Mayes-Osterman

USA TODAY

Minutes before midnight on Feb. 11, the Federal Aviation Administration shut down the airspace over El Paso, Texas, for 10 days – longer than the airspace closure after 9/11 – prompting confusion and chaos for air travelers, residents and people trying to make sense of the unprecedented event on social media.

Within hours, the notice was lifted, and the airspace was reopened. Behind the scenes, an intragovernmental tug-of-war was unfolding between the military, which loaned Customs and Border Protection a high-powered laser to take out drones near the border, and the FAA, which had safety concerns over firing the device.

The FAA's shutdown of U.S. airspace did not take effect until more than a day after the laser was fired, according to multiple people with knowledge of the matter. The high-tech device was fired Feb. 9, USA TODAY has learned. The account has been corroborated by multiple news outlets.

Several outlets have also reported that the laser was fired at an object officials believed was a drone. They later learned it was a party balloon.

Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth authorized the device to be handed over to CBP in January, according to USA TODAY sources. At issue were laws prohibiting the military from using lethal force on U.S. soil against a nonmilitary target – in this case, the thousands of drones that fly across the border every year.

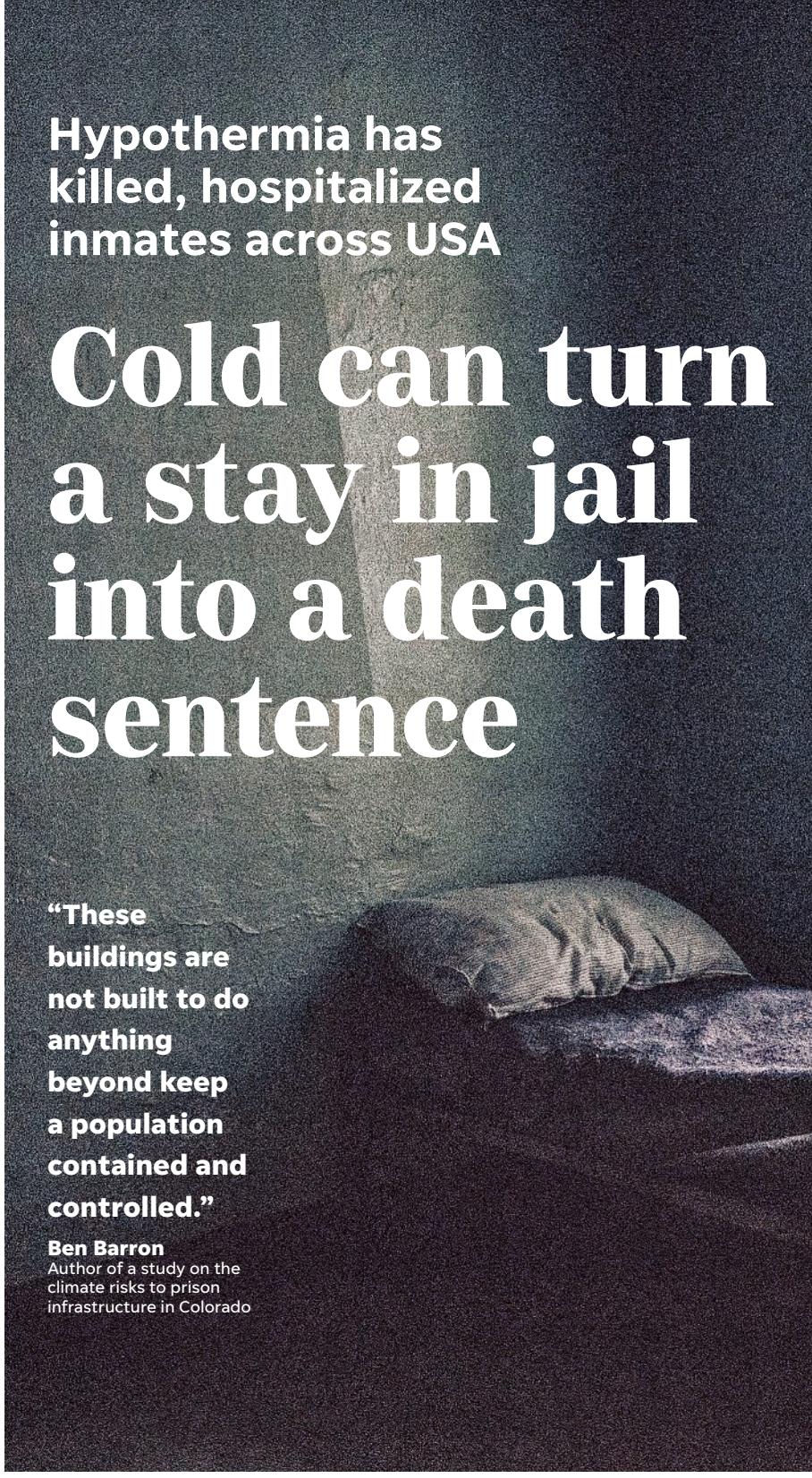
The military trained CBP for several days this year at Fort Bliss, an Army base in El Paso, on how to use the laser, the sources said.

By law, it falls to the Pentagon to coordinate firing the laser with the FAA. Aviation officials, feeling the risk was too high, resorted to shutting everything down, according to sources with knowledge of the matter. A meeting between military and aviation officials was scheduled for this week. It was unclear whether it is still on the books.

An administration official initially told USA TODAY on the morning of Feb. 11 that a Mexican cartel drone had crossed into U.S. airspace, and the military took action to disable it. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy echoed that account in an X post, saying the military and FAA had "acted swiftly to address a cartel drone incursion."

But that explanation didn't bear

See BREAKDOWN, Page 2A



GETTY IMAGES

N'dea Yancey-Bragg USA TODAY

As temperatures outside the DeKalb County Jail plunged into the teens, a tragedy was unfolding inside the Georgia jail. • Lamar Walker was begging for help and slowly freezing to death, according to a federal lawsuit filed by his family. • Walker, 34, was arrested in December 2022 on charges of aggravated assault and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, according to local media. Walker, who had been detained at the jail several times before, was experiencing a mental health crisis and tried to flush his clothes down the toilet, prompting staff to confiscate his clothing, according to the lawsuit.

Anticipating the cold temperatures, a jail official directed employees to provide two blankets to inmates in the coldest cells. But Walker was given no blankets and left "completely naked and agitated," the lawsuit said.

Just eight days after his arrest,

Walker was dead. Temperatures in his cell had reached 50 degrees, well below the 72 to 76 degrees required by jail policy, and an autopsy report found his cause of death was hypothermia, according to the lawsuit.

See KILLER COLD, Page 6A



Inside the DeKalb County Jail, shown here, in Decatur, Georgia, Lamar Walker died of hypothermia after his cell fell to 50 degrees, far below the 72 to 76 degrees required by jail policy. ELIJAH NOUVELAGE/REUTERS

Shutdown might hamper travel, aid

TSA, FEMA say it'll also hurt employees, morale

Zachary Schermele and Aysha Bagchi USA TODAY

Funding for the Department of Homeland Security has expired, potentially jeopardizing critical government services like airport security and disaster relief.

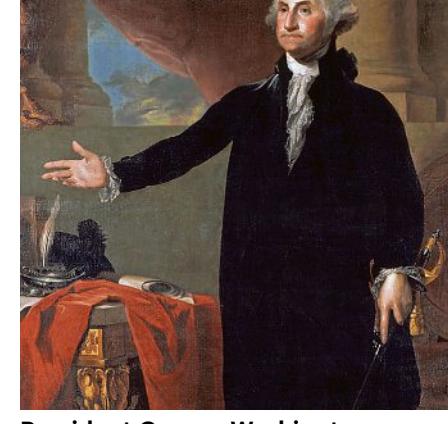
Appropriations for the 9/11-era Cabinet agency lapsed after Feb. 13, as negotiations continued between congressional Democrats and the White House over curbing immigration enforcement. No deal was in sight as lawmakers left for a weeklong scheduled recess, with many taking planned trips overseas.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-New York, pledged last week that Democrats wouldn't back funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement without added guardrails for federal immigration agents.

"The Republican bill on the floor allows ICE to smash in doors without warrants, to wear masks and not be identified, to use children as bait for their parents," Schumer said in a video statement posted on social media Feb. 12. "No oversight? We are keeping our word. No funding for ICE until it is reined in, until the violence ends."

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-South Dakota, said on Fox

See SHUTDOWN, Page 6A



President George Washington was elected eight years after the war's end. PROVIDED BY WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION/WHITE HOUSE COLLECTION

America's first president? Not Washington, historians say

Karissa Waddick

USA TODAY

Every American knows about George Washington, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, but what about John Hanson, Elias Boudinot and Thomas Mifflin?

Some historians point to the latter three as the country's real first presidents, despite what most people think.

Confused? Let's rewind back to the Revolutionary era.

The nation's War for Independence against Great Britain ended in 1781, after the king's army surrendered at the Battle of Yorktown. George Washington wasn't elected president until 1789, after the Constitution was ratified.

During those eight intervening years, a series of other leaders took the

See PRESIDENTS, Page 6A



0.8
©COPRIGHT 2026 USA TODAY, A division of USA TODAY Co., Inc.
0 89505 01005 9

HOME DELIVERY
1-800-872-0001, USATODAYSERVICE.COM