



JOE MANCHIN. GREG BLUESTEIN.

As he contemplates a third-party presidential run, U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin joins AJC reporter and Politically Georgia’s Greg Bluestein for a virtual town hall.

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OPINION

FALCONS PULL ANOTHER STUNNER


Mark Bradley
Only in the AJC

If nothing else, the Falcons answered a question that, in the history of the world, had never been asked. Is it possible for a team that has never won


It’s not 28-3, but passing on Belichick to bring back Morris is surprising.

a Super Bowl to interview – twice! – a coach who has won six Super Bowls ... and not hire him? Apparently so. Apparently it’s also possible to hire as head coach a man who, not long ago, was their interim head coach but who was denied the position on a permanent – not that anything in sports is per-

manent – basis. Instead the Falcons tapped the Titans’ offensive coordinator, who lasted three years. Apparently it’s also possible to announce, at 3:50 p.m. EST, that you’ve conducted a second interview with the Texans’ offensive coordinator and

Morris continued on **A11**

ABOUT RAHEEM MORRIS



- Has won 2 Super Bowls as a coaching staff member (XXXVII with the Tampa Bay and LVI with the Los Angeles Rams).
- Has 59 games as a head coach, including 3 seasons at the helm in Tampa Bay and 11 games with the Falcons as interim head coach in 2020. He compiled a 21-38 record.
- Has served as defensive coordinator for the Rams since 2021.

FOR A SPECIAL FALCONS EXTRA, CLICK HERE

DRENCHED!
There’s more soggy weather ahead



Liseth Rodriquez (foreground) and Erenia Martines cross the street in Midtown on Thursday morning as rain pelted metro Atlanta. Commuters were slowed by the wet conditions; safety officials advise that if you’re driving and encounter flooded roads, turn around, since most flood deaths occur in vehicles. JOHN SPINK/JOHN.SPINK@AJC.COM

Metro Atlantans woke up to mild temperatures and soggy conditions Thursday morning, with much of the area under a flood watch or warning. A majority of the metro area, as well as most of North Georgia, remained under a flood watch that has been extended through Saturday evening, according to the National Weather Service. We’ll repeat the pattern today, though less rain is expected and it should break up around midday. Another round of widespread downpours is expected to arrive Saturday morning and stick around through Sunday morning.

Antisemitism
bill passes
Ga. House
and Senate

Kemp plans to sign bill prioritized in wake of Israel-Hamas war.

By Mark Niesse
Mark.Niesse@ajc.com

The Georgia General Assembly overwhelmingly passed a bill Thursday that defines antisemitism as part of the state’s hate crimes law, giving its final approval over opposition from those who say it could limit criticism of Israel.

Votes by the state Senate and House sent the bill to Gov. Brian Kemp, who said he plans to sign it into law. The Senate passed the measure 44-6, followed by a quick 129-5 vote in the House.

Lawmakers prioritized the antisemitism bill in the wake of the Israel-Hamas war that began Oct. 7, saying Jewish people need greater protections from crimes motivated by bigotry.

“Antisemitism was already at a record high before Oct. 7, and it just skyrocketed afterward,” said state Rep. Esther Panitch, a Democrat from Sandy Springs and the only Jewish legislator in Georgia. “It’s a recognition and a relief that we’ve been heard by the entire state.”

Even before the Israel-Hamas war, hate groups repeatedly distributed fliers smearing Jewish people in Atlanta-area neighborhoods. Jewish residents told lawmakers about an increase

Legislature continued on **A6**

ALSO INSIDE
» GOP open to adding to health care rolls, **A11**

SPORTS, C1

Braves radio
broadcaster
leaving booth

After 15 years, Jim Powell no longer is a member of the Braves’ radio booth. Powell, a Roswell native, announced the news Thursday on X, formerly known as Twitter. “I have zero regrets,” Powell wrote in his post. “I literally have friends from the basement of the stadium to the rafters. I’ll miss seeing you all every day.”



Local economy in 2023 was
strong but finished mixed

6,200 jobs shed in December, but unemployment rate is 2.8%.

By Michael E. Kanell
michael.kanell@ajc.com

In a somewhat mixed coda to a surprisingly upbeat year, metro Atlanta shed jobs in December but still finished the year with a historically low unemployment rate and growth of 72,000 jobs, the state Labor Department said Thursday.

The region shed 6,200 jobs during the month, with gains in some sectors offset by losses elsewhere.

That followed robust hiring earlier in the holiday season, so the region’s growth for the full year was greater than pre-pandemic, despite a chorus of economists predicting recession in the face of high interest rates and persistent inflation.

It was “a blockbuster year,” said Bruce Thompson, the state labor commissioner. The unemployment rate slid from 3.1% in November to 2.8%, within hailing distance of the record pre-pandemic low of 2.6%. The number of unemployed – out

Jobs continued on **A6**

NATIONAL NUMBERS



U.S. economy grew at a surprisingly strong 3.3% pace in last quarter.
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3.3%: Annual pace the nation’s economy grew from October through December

4.9%: Annual pace the nation’s economy grew the previous quarter

2.8%: Annual rate of consumer spending

Trump joins
call to oust
Fulton DA,
citing bias

Former president slams Willis’ remarks at historic Black church.

By Tamar Hallerman
Tamar.Hallerman@ajc.com

Donald Trump on Thursday joined a push to disqualify District Attorney Fani Willis from prosecuting Fulton County’s election interference case, saying her defiant remarks at a historic Black church showed “racial animus” toward the former president and his co-defendants.

In a court filing, Trump’s two top Atlanta attorneys accused Willis, who is Black, of a “glaring, flagrant, and calculated effort to foment racial bias into this case.” That could unfairly prejudice a jury, they said, and violated Georgia’s rules of professional conduct.

Trump’s lawyers Steve Sadow and Jennifer Little weighed in a little more than two weeks after explosive allegations emerged that Willis was in a secret relationship with one of the case’s special prosecutors and benefiting financially from it.

Willis’ only public comments

Trump continued on **A6**

MORE TOP NEWS, A2
President Biden sends CIA director to negotiate Gaza hostage deal

William Burns will try to broker an agreement on the remaining captives and a two-month cease-fire in fighting between Israel, Hamas.


MORE TOP NEWS, A3
2 lawsuits over fatal UGA crash face long delays

That’s because the attorney representing a former star player is also a state senator.

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