


Bound for LA, Trump ups his threat to withhold fire aid and keeps Newsom out of the loop

 *by Alexei Koseff*
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Gov. Gavin Newsom tours the downtown business district of Pacific Palisades as the Palisades Fire burned on Jan. 8, 2025. Today President Trump is due to arrive. Photo by Eric Thayer, Getty Images

In summary: The Trump administration apparently opted not to coordinate at all with Gov. Newsom while planning the president's visit to fire-ravaged Los Angeles today. Just how awkward will this be?

President Donald Trump has repeatedly railed against California's governor as "Newscum," spread misinformation about the causes of the Los Angeles fires and suggested that California [will not receive the typical federal aid](#) for recovery unless it changes its water policy. Or its [forestry policy](#). Or its [immigration sanctuary policy](#).

This morning, as he prepared to fly to the fire zone, he added a new one: voter ID.

“People want to have voter identification. You want to have proof of citizenship. Ideally you have one-day voting. But I just want voter ID as a start, and I want the water to be released,” Trump [told reporters](#) on the tarmac during a stop in North Carolina. “After that, I will be the greatest president that California has ever seen.”

The demand further politicized a fragile situation that has left Gov. Gavin Newsom scrambling to respond to the whims of the president — or even to speak with him at all — to secure billions of dollars from the federal government to help Los Angeles fight an ongoing firestorm and rebuild.

For days since Trump announced his intent to travel to Los Angeles to survey fire damage, a question has hung over his planned visit: Will Newsom be there?

Tension between the newly reinstalled Republican president and California’s Democratic governor — longtime political nemeses who nevertheless [routinely worked together on disaster recovery](#) during Trump’s first term — exploded alongside the fires that have burned through Pacific Palisades, Altadena and other swaths of the Los Angeles region over the past two weeks.

The governor had [quickly extended an invitation to Trump](#) to visit Los Angeles, an effort to lower the temperature as partisan demands soared to punish California for supposedly mismanaging the disaster. But Newsom acknowledged late Thursday afternoon that he had still not heard back from the president, less than a day before his expected touchdown in California.

Excluding Newsom would be a stinging rebuke of the governor, who met with Trump when he traveled to California fire zones in 2018 and 2020. On Wednesday, the president indicated to Fox News host Sean Hannity that he might not offer Newsom the same courtesy this time around: “I don’t know. I haven’t even thought about it,” Trump said.

But Newsom struck an optimistic tone with reporters Thursday, after [approving \\$2.5 billion in fire recovery funds](#) that he hopes will eventually be reimbursed by the federal government. He promised to be at the airport today to greet Trump — even if a spokesperson said his office didn’t yet know which airport. And Newsom said he expected the president would ultimately “do the right thing” for Los Angeles.

“I’m glad he’s coming out here. I’m grateful that the president’s taking the time,” Newsom said. “And I hope he comes with a spirit of cooperation and collaboration. That’s the spirit to which we welcome him.”

It’s common for presidents and governors of opposing political parties to do battle on policy differences and then come together when natural disasters strike, said state Sen. Ben Allen, a Santa Monica Democrat whose district has been badly damaged by the Palisades fire.

“It would be a delicate balance under any president and certainly, it’s more delicate under this president,” he told CalMatters. “It may appear a little messy, and perhaps it is, but it’s also an integral part of our federal system.”

Trump chose not to snub the state’s two Democratic U.S. senators, Alex Padilla and Adam Schiff, whom he dubbed “Shifty Schiff” for investigating him during his first term.

“A number of us invited (the president) to come to this state and he reciprocated, inviting us to join him to go to these fire areas,” Schiff said in an MSNBC interview this morning. “Regrettably, Senator Padilla and I have votes today in the Senate so we aren’t able to go. But I’m glad he’s going.”

As for Newsom, he’s at a precarious moment in his relationship with the president. While he initially positioned California at the forefront of a renewed resistance after Trump won a second term in November, even calling a [special session to fund litigation](#) against the incoming administration, Newsom now finds himself dependent on the goodwill of a federal government almost fully under the sway of Trump.

It’s unclear how forthcoming federal assistance will be. Since the outbreak of the Los Angeles fires more than two weeks ago, Trump has continued to [inaccurately claim that Los Angeles lacked water](#) to fight these fires because the state does not send enough water south from Northern California. He has depicted them as Newsom’s fault and even demanded that he resign, although fire and climate experts have repeatedly attributed the blazes to off-the-charts [dry conditions in the face of ferocious Santa Ana winds](#).

Nonetheless, with the support of many congressional Republicans, the president has threatened to withhold or condition disaster aid.

Trump’s interest in voter ID goes back to at least 2016, when he began insisting, without any evidence, that he failed to win the deep blue state of California because [people who aren’t citizens participated in the presidential election](#). A new California law that took effect this year [prohibits local governments from requiring voters to present identification](#) to cast their ballots in an election.

In a post on [social media](#), Newsom’s press office pointed out that California requires people to present identification when they register to vote and wrote, “Conditioning aid for American citizens is wrong.”

Newsom has substantially, though not entirely, pulled his punches against Trump in recent weeks. He largely kept a low profile leading up to the president’s visit, working on fire response from Los Angeles. After the president erroneously complained in Monday’s inauguration speech that the fires were burning “without even a token of defense,” Newsom issued a gentle statement that emphasized “finding common ground and striving toward shared goals” with the Trump administration.

“In the face of one of the worst natural disasters in America’s history, this moment underscores the critical need for partnership, a shared commitment to facts, and mutual respect,” Newsom said.

Yet he also, on social media, slammed several of Trump’s early executive orders on immigration and climate change, then sent an email to supporters deriding the passage from Trump’s inaugural speech as “nonsense” and “insulting” to firefighters.

Meanwhile, the governor’s special session to “safeguard California values” from the Trump administration continues on, with Democrats in the state Senate voting Thursday to advance \$25 million for legal fees. Republican lawmakers have lambasted the session as a distraction from wildfire response and an unnecessary poke at the president.

Allen, the senator from Santa Monica, said he understood that Trump is fulfilling his campaign promises to the Americans who supported him, but that California politicians would be derelict if they didn’t push back, because voters had elected them with a different vision for how to run the country.

“We want, and our constituents want us, to cooperate with the federal government to help on the areas of mutual agreement and need,” he said. “The flip side is, we are also part of the loyal opposition.”

Newsom told reporters Thursday that it was important for the state to prepare to fight Trump at the same time that he is courting the president’s help, noting that Trump “already assaulted the Fourteenth Amendment” with his day one executive order challenging birthright citizenship, which [California immediately sued to stop](#).

The governor evoked the “great relationship” he had with Trump during the COVID pandemic, when they spoke nearly every week, and said he did not expect the special session to affect that because it was “nothing personal,” but rather based on “fundamental policy disagreements.”

“This is situational. Don’t color it in any more than it needs to be,” Newsom said. “I’m here for the long haul, to support the president where we can, to defend our values where we must.”

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