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MORNING REPORT

Friday, May 23 | By Alexis Simendinger & Kristina Karisch



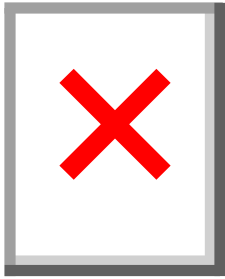
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In today's issue:

- Senate GOP's turn at 'beautiful bill' a challenge
- Courts: No to religious charter school
- "Terrorism": Officials probe embassy murders
- Trump: Putin isn't ready to end Ukraine war



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Senate GOP eyes rocky path to Trump budget

Passage of **President Trump's** mammoth policy agenda Thursday proved tough for House Republicans. The next phase of the legislative battle, controlled by Senate Republicans, may be a bigger lift.

Politics, horse trading and Trump's personal pressure on GOP holdouts in the House nudged his "big, beautiful" agenda to final passage by a single vote. But the Senate does not plan to rubber-stamp the House measure, which means there will be a clash between the chambers, and new frictions within the president's party over specifics, including Medicaid cuts and granting the Treasury Department permission to add to the nation's exploding debt, [The Hill's Alexander Bolton reports](#).

Some Senate conservatives, including Sen. **Rand Paul** (R-Ky.), balk at raising the debt limit by a proposed \$4 trillion to avert a U.S. default this

summer. *"We've never, ever voted to raise the debt ceiling this much,"* [he said](#) on Thursday. *"It's not conservative; I can't support it."*

Some GOP senators want to rework the 1,000-page House-passed behemoth to [divide it into smaller pieces](#), an idea Senate Majority Leader **John Thune** (R-S.D.) championed to Trump, without success, while strategizing with the White House in January. Thune, who has in mind an optimistic deadline of July 4 to pass a budget reconciliation measure that would embody Trump's key tax and spending policies, can only lose a maximum of three votes. Taking two budget bills and eventually turning them into one for Trump's signature while navigating narrow majorities is no easy feat.

"CONSIDERABLE CHANGES": Fellow South Dakota Republican Sen. **Mike Rounds** described Thune's task as "very difficult," adding, *"It's a matter of building consensus, and he's going to have to basically be in touch with almost every single member."*

Senate Republicans believe they can improve on the House-passed effort. *"I think there will be considerable changes in the Senate,"* Sen. **Ted Cruz** (R-Texas) told reporters Thursday, pointing to the GOP's 2017 tax bill, provisions of which Trump does not want to see sunset this year.

"The House [in 2017] passed a good bill. It came to the Senate, and we made it substantially better," Cruz said. The GOP's goal this summer is to re-anchor those tax provisions in statute for another four years.

The House bill approved on Thursday guaranteed months of renewed criticisms from both parties about controversial provisions, such as federal Medicaid cuts and reduced federal food assistance. Eyeing midterm elections next year, Democrats are leaning heavily on decades of messaging experience when it comes to entitlement programs. They warn voters that Republicans want to finance tax cuts for the rich on the backs of working and poor Americans, including millions of families who are struggling with high prices and a weakening economy.

Some Republicans are rattled by current economic forecasts, Trump's tariff policies and the president's declining job approval numbers. Trump was persuasive with House GOP firebrands and moderate holdouts. But senators, who face the voters every six years, have different imperatives in their states, and some Republicans like to remind Trump of that fact.

"In the House, President Trump can threaten a primary, and those guys want to keep their seats. I understand the pressure," Sen. **Ron Johnson** (R-Wis.) [said on Thursday](#). *"Can't pressure me that way."*

"DON'T TOUCH IT, JOSH": Missouri Republican Sen. **Josh Hawley** opposes the House-passed Medicaid changes. Nearly 19 percent of his

state's population benefits from Medicaid. The [numbers in other red states](#) explain the dilemma for some GOP senators: West Virginia saw 33 percent of its population enrolled in Medicaid last year; in Kentucky, it was 35 percent, and in Louisiana, it was 42 percent.

[Recent polls](#) indicate large majorities of Americans, including Republicans, oppose cutting federal funding for Medicaid. The House measure includes [new eligibility restrictions and work requirements](#) for “able-bodied” adults and parents with children. Critics say millions of current beneficiaries could lose health coverage.

Hawley pointed to Trump's advice to bolster his own misgivings.

“We ought to just do what the president said,” Hawley told reporters Thursday, adding that he spoke with Trump about Medicaid on Wednesday.

“He said, ‘We should do no Medicaid benefit cuts. Zero,’” Hawley added. *“His exact words were: ‘Don’t touch it, Josh.’”*

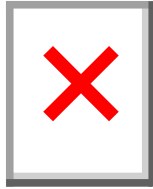
Smart Take
with Blake
Burman

The Trump administration [released its "Make America Healthy Again" \(MAHA\) report](#), outlining their views on how ultra-processed food, environmental toxins, and excessive medical intervention impact children.

I asked Food and Drug Administration Commissioner **Marty Makary**, a surgeon, what the administration plans to do next from an implementation standpoint.

“This is a call to unite around medical science and look at root causes,” Makary told me. *“So this is educating the public and letting them know we are delivering on our promise to look at the root causes of our chronic disease epidemic.”*

The report read like a thesis, with 72 pages and more than 500 citations. Persuading parents that they should read it and act will be one of the ongoing challenges for those who are touting the MAHA movement.



Burman hosts "The Hill" weeknights, 6p/5c on NewsNation.

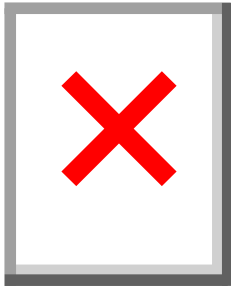


3 Things to Know Today

1. Find Memorial Day observances in states and communities using a Veterans Affairs Department tracker [HERE](#). In the Washington, D.C. area, here are [14 suggestions](#).
2. Rethinking yards: When it comes to lawns, [no-mow all year is trending](#).
3. **Join The Hill's June 5 half-day summit, "Invest in America,"** at 8 a.m. EDT featuring titans from Washington and Wall Street. Participants share insights about economic developments, tariffs, artificial intelligence, crypto, taxes and more. RSVP [HERE](#).

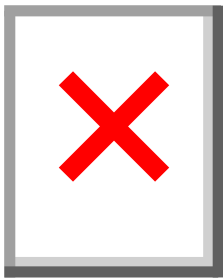
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Grocery stores blame credit card processing costs for higher prices, but that's false. Credit card interchange rates have remained steady for nearly a decade, while grocery bills have skyrocketed. [Learn more.](#)

LEADING THE DAY



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RELIGION IN SCHOOLS: A divided Supreme Court on Thursday [rejected a bid to use government funds](#) for what would be the nation's first religious charter school to teach Catholic doctrine in Oklahoma. The 4-4 deadlock on the high court allowed the Oklahoma Supreme Court's rejection to stand. Justice **Amy Coney Barrett** recused herself. The brief ruling in one of the most anticipated cases of the term came as a surprise, after oral arguments took place only a few weeks ago in April.

- [The New York Times](#): During a podcast interview with the Times, **Vice President Vance** said Chief Justice **John Roberts** was “profoundly wrong” for recent comments he made on the Supreme Court's role to check the excesses of the executive.
- [The Hill](#): The Supreme Court cleared the way Thursday for Trump to fire two Democratic-appointed independent agency leaders, for now, over the dissents of the court's three liberal justices.

- [The Washington Post](#): Trump and the White House on Thursday harshly criticized a federal judge who ruled against the administration in a deportation case this week.

Meanwhile, a Massachusetts district judge on Thursday [blocked Trump's executive order](#) calling for the closure of the Department of Education — as well as against the reduction in force that laid off half of the agency's workers.

The ruling is a blow to Trump's efforts to eliminate the department and the quick actions taken by Education Secretary **Linda McMahon** to make that campaign pledge a reality.

The plaintiffs *"have provided an in-depth look into how the massive reduction in staff has made it effectively impossible for the Department to carry out its statutorily mandated functions,"* said District Judge **Myong Joun**.

Madi Biedermann, deputy assistant secretary for communications for the Education Department, said the federal agency *"will immediately challenge this on an emergency basis."*

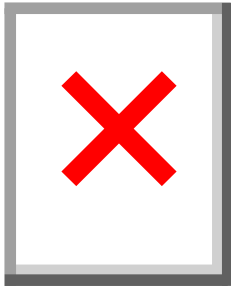
- [NBC News](#): Amid an ongoing standoff with Harvard University, the Trump administration on Thursday halted the Ivy League school's ability to enroll international students.
 - [The Hill](#): The Trump administration issued its long-awaited Make America Healthy Again Commission [report](#) Thursday, hammering various industries while deviating from mainstream science on key issues including farming practices, vaccinations and psychiatric medications.
 - [CNN](#): The federal government may have partial answers on the purported causes of autism by this fall, but not the full picture, as Health and Human Services Secretary **Robert F. Kennedy Jr.** promised.
 - [The Hill](#): Trump is hosted Thursday night with the top investors in his meme coin, in what Democratic lawmakers have alleged is a "pay-to-play scheme" effectively selling access to Trump.
 - [The New York Times](#): Several of the dinner guests said they attended the event with the explicit intent of influencing Trump and U.S. financial regulations.
 - [The Hill](#): Rep. **Glenn Ivey** (D-Md.) is organizing a third trip to El Salvador to see **Kilmar Abrego Garcia**, the Maryland man who was mistakenly deported this year, heading to the Central American nation with the hopes of visiting his constituent.
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WHEN & WHERE

- **Happy Memorial Day weekend!** Morning Report will return to inboxes on Tuesday. In the interim, news-hungry readers can also sign up for The Hill's weekend Tipsheet. [Click here to get it in your inbox.](#)
- **The House** will meet for a pro forma session at 10 a.m.
- **The Senate** will convene for a pro forma session at 10 a.m.
- **The president** will sign executive orders at 1 p.m. in the Oval Office. Trump plans to head to his home in Bedminster, N.J., departing the White House at 3 p.m.
- **Secretary of State Marco Rubio** will meet with Iraqi Kurdistan Region Prime Minister **Masrour Barzani** at the Department of State at 1:30 p.m.

□ Tomorrow in ***The Gavel***: The Hill's Zach Schonfeld and Ella Lee dive into the most vocal justice on the bench. [Click here to sign up & get it in your inbox.](#)

ZOOM IN



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ISRAELI EMBASSY SHOOTING: The fatal shooting of two Israeli Embassy staffers in Washington, D.C., late Wednesday night drew an outpouring of grief as well as [a global condemnation](#) of antisemitic violence. The victims, **Yaron Lischinsky**, 30, and **Sarah Milgrim**, 26, were attending a reception hosted by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) on Wednesday night at the Capital Jewish Museum when they were shot and killed. The two were both staffers at the Israeli Embassy in D.C. and were expected to get engaged to be married within the week.

Police say the suspect, 31-year-old **Elias Rodriguez** of Chicago, was charged with first-degree murder, the murder of foreign officials and other crimes. According to [an FBI agent's affidavit](#), Rodriguez allegedly told officers, *"I did it for Palestine, I did it for Gaza"* on the scene of the attack.

Jewish members of Congress [gathered at the scene Thursday](#) to honor those killed. Among them was Rep. **Jamie Raskin** (D-Md.), who said

antisemitism must end.

“There is no justification ever for terrorism,” Raskin said.

In response to the shooting, the White House is [ramping up its crackdown](#) on antisemitism. The administration has for months taken action against antisemitic activity, with a particular focus on stripping colleges of funding — most notably Harvard — as a way to address discrimination.

Attorney General **Pam Bondi** said that as of Thursday, the threat level has been increased for all Americans.

“I can tell you security has been increased here as of last night. Our U.S. marshals are working hand in hand to make sure our embassy is safe, our ambassador is safe, and again please know that everything we know now — it’s an ongoing investigation,” she said, talking to reporters outside the Capital Jewish Museum, which was the site of the shooting. *“Whether you are Jewish or not, be vigilant.”*

White House press secretary **Karoline Leavitt** outlined actions the administration has already taken to combat antisemitism, including an executive order that the president signed to form the Joint Task Force to Combat Anti-Semitism and steps to revoke student visas — which has been widely criticized by those who say it is punishing people in the United States who are engaging in free speech.

- [Politico](#): The Trump administration is rallying around Israel, but not Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu**. Israel sees Thursday’s shooting as a new front in a regional war. The White House views it through a domestic lens.

- [The New York Times](#): Israelis, stunned by the D.C. shooting, fear backlash over the war in Gaza. Political leaders pointed fingers at each other, suggesting that their opponents were responsible for a rise in antisemitism and criticism of Israel.

- [The Wall Street Journal](#): Columbia University violated federal civil-rights law by ignoring the harassment of Jewish students by classmates, a government investigation found.

BACK-TO-SCHOOL TARIFFS: The worst impacts of Trump's tariffs could hit just in time for back-to-school shopping, [writes The Hill’s Lexi Lonas Cochran](#). Whether or not Trump reaches new deals with China and other trading partners, spikes in prices are already affecting clothing, electronics and other classroom essentials, and the deepest cuts could be mere weeks away. Parents’ back-to-school habits are already changing, and businesses are stressing about the effects to their bottom line, with major family retailers including Walmart and Target sending up warning signs to consumers.

- [USA Today](#): Which big retailers have signaled price hikes due to tariffs?
- [CNBC](#): Nike will raise prices on a wide range of products as soon as this week.

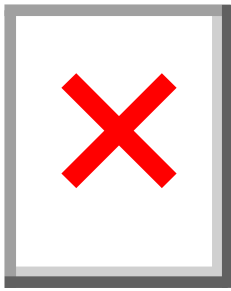
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ELSEWHERE



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UKRAINE: Trump told European leaders on a Monday call that Russian President **Vladimir Putin** isn't ready to end the war in Ukraine because he thinks he is winning, [The Wall Street Journal reports](#). The officials characterized the call as "rambling and at-times contradictory," adding Trump said he believed Putin ultimately wants peace, but on Moscow's terms.

But Trump has not done what European leaders and Ukrainian President **Volodymyr Zelensky** have been arguing he should do: Double down on the fight against Russia.

Russian armed forces, meanwhile, are creating a "security buffer zone" along the border between Russia and Ukraine, [Putin said Thursday](#). Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesperson **Heorhii Tykhyi** said the plan was "aggressive" and demonstrated that "*Russia is the obstacle of peace efforts now.*"

- [The Washington Post](#): Tracking Trump's flip-flops on how easy it would be to end the Russia-Ukraine war. The president has gone from a "24-hour" deal to "back away" in just a few months.
- [The Hill](#): Trump has turned Oval Office meetings with foreign leaders into diplomatic thrill rides, which at times have crashed, a la Zelensky, and at other times have been surprisingly smooth sailing, such as **Canadian** Prime Minister **Mark Carney's** visit.

GAZA: In response to criticism of the Israeli military's further incursion into Gaza, Netanyahu [launched a blistering attack](#) on **British** Prime Minister **Keir Starmer**, **French** President **Emmanuel Macron** and Carney, saying the leaders are on the wrong side of justice.

"You're on the wrong side of humanity and you're on the wrong side of history," Netanyahu said.

Meanwhile, aid workers are struggling to distribute a trickle of aid entering Gaza and describe a logistical "nightmare" amid a spiraling humanitarian crisis.

"With this limited amount of aid, the humanitarian situation continues to get worse and worse," Dr. **Amjad Alshawa**, director of the Palestinian NGOs Network, an umbrella group of Palestinian organizations, [told NBC News](#). *"At the same time, the Israelis are imposing restrictions on access to these supplies."*

Flour and other aid started reaching some of the enclave's most vulnerable areas on Thursday, [but Palestinian officials said](#) the levels were nowhere near enough to make up for shortages caused by an 11-week aid blockade.

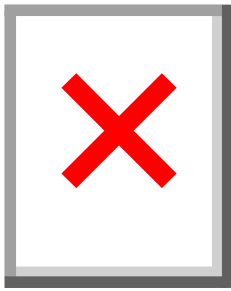
- [ABC News](#): Doctor details Gaza famine: *"We're not asking for miracles. We're asking for food."*
- [CNN](#): **Iran** and the U.S. are set to begin a fifth round of high-stakes nuclear talks in Rome today amid growing skepticism in Tehran about the chances of a deal as Washington hardens its position.
- [Reuters](#): Trump showed a screenshot of a Reuters video taken in the **Democratic Republic of Congo** as part of what he falsely presented on Wednesday as evidence of mass killings of white **South Africans**.

□ Introducing **The Gavel**: Each Wednesday, *The Hill's courts newsletter* dives into the latest legal battles in Washington. [Click here to sign up & get it in your inbox.](#)

OPINION

- **How the Senate can improve the House tax and budget bill**, by [The Wall Street Journal editorial board](#).
- **Sorry, Donald Trump, but Ukraine is your war**, by Hal Brands, columnist, [Bloomberg Opinion](#).
- **Trump just handed Democrats their midterm message**, by Rahm Emanuel, opinion contributor, [The Washington Post](#).

THE CLOSER



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And finally ... □□□ Congratulations to this week's **Morning Report Quiz winners!** Readers puzzled over trivia about **lengthy talking and tenures in Congress** and aced the answers.

Here's who went 4/4: **Lynn Gardner, Jenessa Wagner, Aaron M. Vande Linde, Stanton Kirk, Rick Schmidtke, Harry Strulovici, Robert Bradley, William Chittam, Ned Sauthoff, Savannah Petracca, Jose Ramos, Pam Manges, Steve James and Carmine Petracca.**

They knew last week's House Energy and Commerce Committee markup session for the "one big, beautiful" budget bill lasted **27 hours**.

The longest 20th century lame-duck session of Congress, starting in November 1940, spanned **58 days**.

Sen. **Cory Booker** (D-N.J.) spoke for **25 hours and 5 minutes** when he broke the record for longest filibuster this year.

The late Rep. **John Dingell** (D-Mich.) holds the record for longest tenure in Congress, having served **59 years** in the House.

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