

# News From The States

## EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

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Health care is never a particularly rosy topic in the United States, because the United States is terrible at health care. We [pay more for it](#) than any other country on the planet, which has done [precisely nothing](#) to improve our [collectively dismal health metrics](#). (Among our terrible superlatives: The world's highest rates of obesity, maternal and infant mortality, and death from avoidable or treatable conditions.) We are, essentially, in a perpetual health crisis. The details may vary from day to date or place to place, but ultimately, none of us are immune.



### The Big Takeaway

For example: New Mexico's rate of maternal mortality remains well above the national average, even though those deaths are "overwhelmingly preventable," according to an [annual report](#) presented to lawmakers last week. Stemming the tide, according to public health experts, will require expanding access, particularly for people of color and patients struggling with substance abuse, [Source New Mexico reported](#).



*Just growing a human, it's fine.  
(Photo by Getty Images)*

**Through 2019**, the national pregnancy-related mortality ratio was 17.3 deaths per 100,000 live births, the report said. In New Mexico, it was 31.2 deaths through 2020. More than three-fourths of those deaths occurred within the first year after giving birth, and most were not directly linked to pregnancy — at least, not in the way you might think, said Abigail Reese, head of the state health department’s maternal health program.

“Mental health conditions, especially substance-use disorders, remain the most significant contributing factors to maternal mortality in our state,” Reese said. “That means we need to do more to direct treatment and resources and support to people who are navigating substance use while pregnant and in the postpartum period.”

The state’s mortality ratio was particularly high – 129.3 deaths per 100,000 births — among Native American women, a “significant discordance,” Reese said.

“There is no explanation, as we all know, based at all in biology, so we need to get to the bottom of why this is happening,” Reese said. “It is consistent with national data as well and is our responsibility to solve.”



*A big responsibility.*  
(Photo by Getty Images)

The report, prepared by the New Mexico Maternal Mortality Review Committee, recommended revamping the system as a whole rather than implementing piecemeal policy changes. Often, Reese said, patients are grappling with outside stressors like unemployment or domestic violence in addition to their pregnancies, which providers may not be equipped to handle. But they could be, she added.

“People are dealing with lots of stressors, and they go beyond their immediate health condition and health care needs, which helps us remember that our services need to be trauma-informed and comprehensive and think about people in the full context of their lives,” Reese said.

**Context was lacking last week in Congress**, where Republicans convened a subcommittee to “unmask” (see what [they did there](#)) the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s “challenges ... in rebuilding public trust amid respiratory illness season.” Their star witness: CDC Director Mandy Cohen, who took office in July but was still expected to answer for what the GOP-majority Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations [described as](#) the agency’s

“confusing messaging and other failures” during the height of the pandemic, [NC Newsline reported](#).



*Dr. Mandy Cohen, who probably was not confused by the messaging.  
(Photo by Win McNamee/Getty Images)*

Cohen, former secretary of health and human services for the state of North Carolina, made a valiant attempt to dodge the partisan rancor, telling lawmakers she was committed to increasing transparency, collaborating with other agencies and providing “clear communication” in hopes of restoring trust in the CDC.

“But even as CDC takes concrete steps to achieve these goals, we know we cannot do it alone,” she continued. “We do need help from Congress to support a CDC that has both the resources and the policy levers to be the national security asset we all need.”

**Theoretically, this provided an opening to a substantive discussion** about public health policy, which Republicans ignored because substantive discussion was not the point of this particular subcommittee hearing. Instead, they grilled Cohen on right-wing talking points, from the CDC’s efforts to address climate change (“What’s up with that?” mused Rep. Buddy Carter, a Georgia Republican) to pandemic-era grievances like mask mandates. The CDC stopped enforcing its mask order in April 2022, but never mind – it happened, which means it could



happen again, which made it a timely topic as far as Rep. Gary Palmer was concerned.

“So, you would continue to require masking for two-year-olds?” asked Palmer, a Republican from Alabama, which [dropped its mask mandate](#) nearly three years ago. “A lot of people that felt like this was more about power than it was medicine. And if you’re going to continue to try to do a sales job, it’s going to be difficult to get us on board with the CDC because people don’t trust you anymore.”



*This child has to wear a mask in 2021, so tell us what you have to SAY FOR YOURSELF!  
(Photo by Jon Cherry/Getty Images)*

If Cohen is truly interested in rebuilding that trust, added Rep. Dan Crenshaw (R-Texas), she should start by acknowledging the missteps in the agency’s pandemic response. That shouldn’t be a big deal, he added, because Cohen wasn’t responsible for those policies, which makes it easy for her to disparage them, or something.

“You’re in the perfect position to do it because you had nothing to do with their decisions at the time. So, there’s no reason to defend it,” Crenshaw said. “You can blame it on hindsight. You can blame it on, you know, we didn’t know as

much as we know now at the time. You can do a little sort of things, but you can tell the truth and then the public will start trusting the CDC again.”

Cohen declined to criticize her predecessors but said the agency would craft its response protocols based on what it learned from the pandemic. Rebuilding that trust is a shared responsibility, she added.

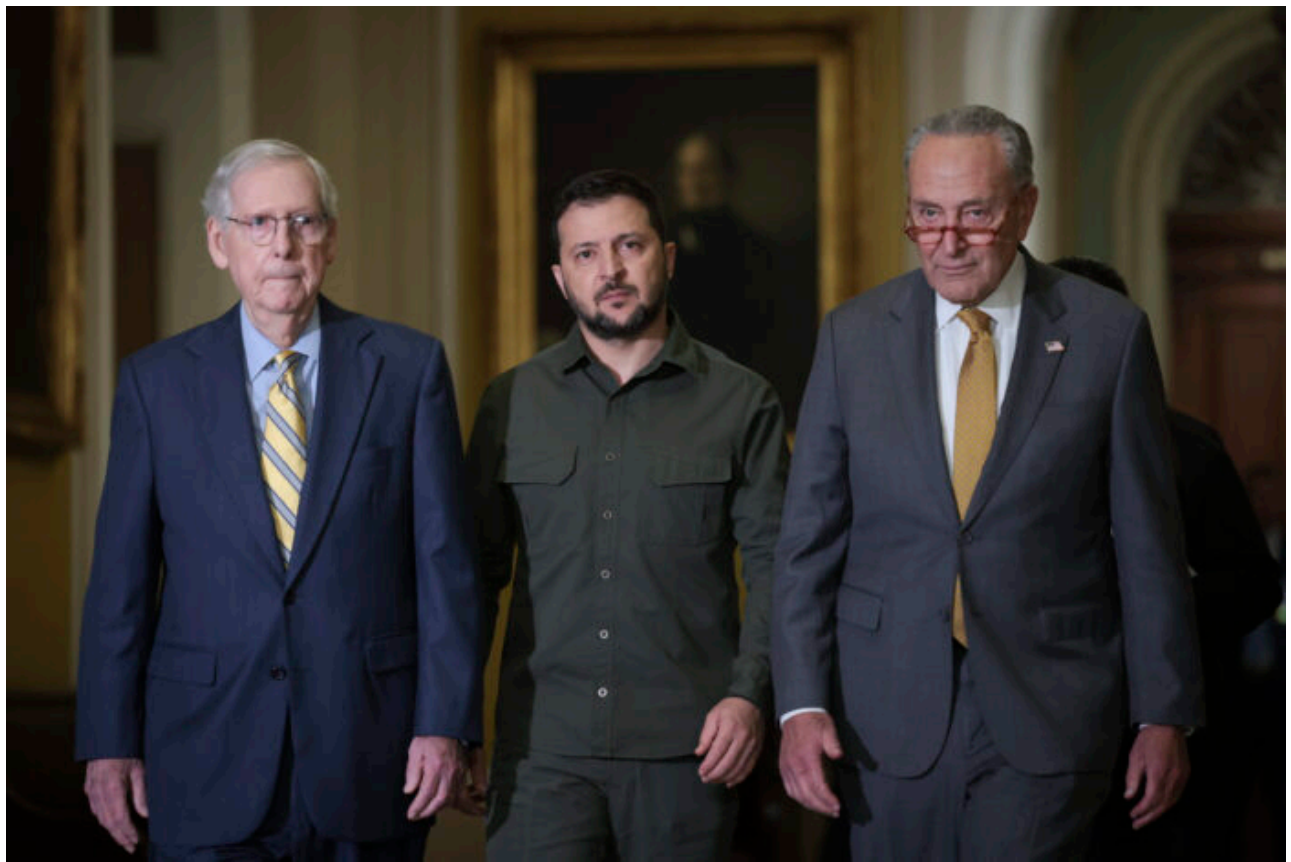
“Help us get good information out to communities,” she said. “Make sure that they hear the good information, the accurate information, so they can make choices for themselves.”

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## State of Our Democracy

White House officials on Monday sought to reframe a supplemental funding request for \$50 billion for Ukraine as a state-level economic driver, [our D.C. bureau reported](#). In a letter, White House budget director Shalanda Young [warned congressional leaders](#) that withholding aid would further empower Russia *and* hamper defense manufacturers in states across the country that have already benefited from earlier funding packages.



*A totally not-awkward photo op!*  
(Photo by Win McNamee/Getty Images)

“While we cannot predict exactly which U.S. companies will be awarded new contracts, we do know the funding will be used to acquire advanced capabilities to defend against attacks on civilians in Israel and Ukraine — for example, air defense systems built in Alabama, Texas, and Georgia and vital subcomponents sourced from nearly all 50 states,” Young wrote.

The funding would also “modernize vital munitions and equipment like Javelins made in Alabama; Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS) made in West Virginia, Arkansas and Texas; tactical vehicles made in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Michigan and Indiana; and 155mm artillery shells made in Pennsylvania, Arkansas, and Iowa and many other states,” she wrote.

The funding request has been on the table since October, but negotiations have stalled amid disagreements on [border security](#) and [aid to Israel](#). Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said the Senate will vote on a package this week, which will probably not pass unless it includes immigration policy changes requested by Republicans (and abhorred by Schumer). It’s stuck, basically, and unless it gets unstuck by the end of the year, “we will run out of resources to procure more weapons and equipment for Ukraine and to provide equipment from U.S.

military stocks,” according to Young.

“There is no magical pot of funding available to meet this moment,” she added.  
“We are out of money — and nearly out of time.”

**Tick tock:** [Next GOP presidential primary debate happens Wednesday in Alabama](#) ... [Former Colts punter Hunter Smith launches Indiana Statehouse bid](#) ... [Kansas political scientist: GOP rivals struggling to attract Trump’s super fans in Iowa](#) ... [This is who will appear on Maine’s presidential primary ballots in March](#) ... [This year’s legislative races among most expensive in New Jersey history](#) ... [North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum suspends 2024 presidential campaign](#) ... [Rhode Island. GOP defends Trump’s right to appear on 2024 ballot in Colorado](#) ... [Hmong veterans of the Vietnam War would receive Congressional Gold Medal under push by lawmakers](#)



## From The Newsrooms

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- [Cannabis workers across Missouri begin push to unionize dispensaries](#)
- [Northern Virginia commuter ferry unlikely to launch any time soon — but there’s still interest](#)
- [Indiana lawmakers want to hold back more 3rd graders. Will it actually improve literacy?](#)
- [Tennessee’s prison population grows as violent crime drops steeply](#)



## One Last Thing

“Rizz” — Gen Z slang for “style, charm or attractiveness” or “the ability to attract a romantic or sexual partner,” which I definitely knew before right now — is the word of the year, [Oxford University Press](#) announced Monday. The term, derived from “charisma,” was selected over other terms I [definitely also understand](#), including “beige flag,” “situationship” and “de-influencing.” (Also “Swiftie,” which everyone understands, whether they want to or not.)



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