

News From The States

EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

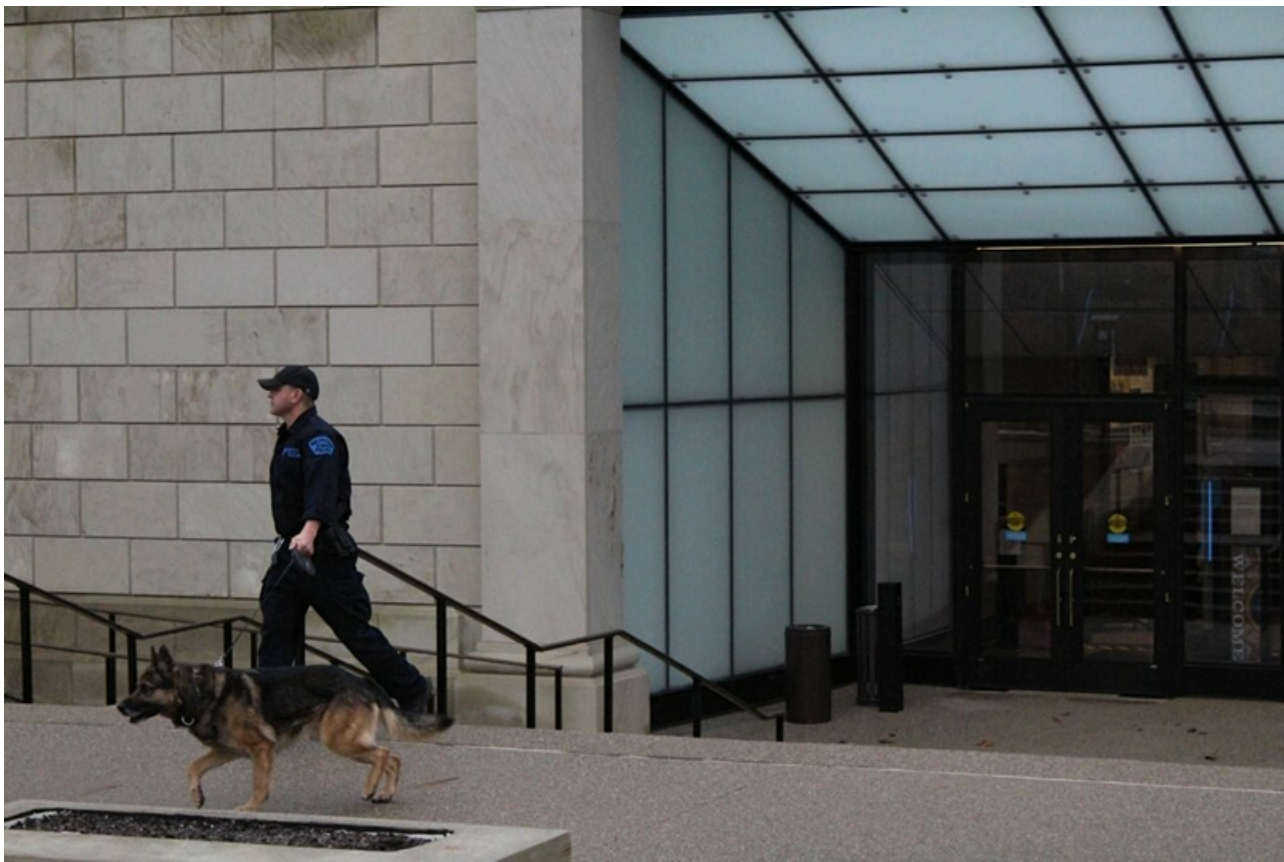
Today I agreed to let my computer install an update, solely because it had been so long since I last did it that I forgot how long it takes, and also that my computer is a lying liar who lies. “Ten minutes remaining,” it kept saying, and then sat there for an hour, doing ... something (probably), all while my anxiety mounted and mounted and mounted. At some point I pondered canceling the update, but I’m not sure if you’re really allowed to do that, or if it would break something, so I opted against it. By then another half hour had gone by. This was, I decided, probably just my life now.

Eventually it finished and rebooted itself to reveal ... nothing. This concludes the update to my computer update, leaving me free to begin the actual news update.



The Big Takeaway

At least nine state capitols were evacuated Wednesday after a false bomb threat was emailed to legislative staffers and government officials across the country. No explosives were found in any of the buildings, and most of the lockdowns lasted only a few hours, though at least one facility — the Michigan Capitol — remained closed for the day, [per the Michigan Advance](#).



*You can't pet him because he's working.
(Photo by Anna Liz Nichols/Michigan Advance)*

“We are aware of similar threats sent to government agencies across the country,” said Lt. Rene Gonzalez, public information officer for the Michigan State Police First District Headquarters. “The Capitol was evacuated, the building searched, and the Michigan State Police currently has MSP Canine teams still sweeping the building. Out of an abundance of caution, the Capitol will remain closed for the rest of the day.”

Statehouses in [Connecticut](#), [Georgia](#), [Kentucky](#), [Maine](#), [Minnesota](#), [Mississippi](#), [Montana](#) and [Oklahoma](#) were also evacuated, but most had reopened by lunchtime. Officials in most of those states said they were working with federal investigators to determine the source of the threat, which remained unclear as of Wednesday afternoon.

Except not really. Regardless of who sent it, the email is part of a broader pattern of political violence that began percolating in 2015, when Donald Trump descended the [golden escalator](#) and launched a presidential campaign by labeling Mexicans as [rapists and criminals](#). He spent the next year calling for [Hillary Clinton's imprisonment](#), villainizing [journalists](#), encouraging his supporters to [assault protesters](#) and [vowing retribution](#) for his critics. This was never just

rhetoric, which became all too clear when MAGA militants stormed the U.S. Capitol on [Jan. 6, 2021](#).



*Once more for the people in the back (and to the right).
(Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)*

And it's only gotten worse since then. Election workers have been besieged by [so many threats](#), including envelopes [laced with fentanyl](#), that many states now put them through [safety training](#). Back to campaigning, Trump now borrows language [directly from Adolf Hitler](#) and is openly plotting to spend a second term installing [an authoritarian regime](#) to punish his political enemies. That messaging works well with Republican voters, a third of whom [now believe](#) that violence is a normal part of political discourse.

The tension is [unlikely to abate](#) before this year's presidential election, which will hinge not only on swing voters and the stupid electoral college but also on the courts, where Trump faces [91 felony charges](#) and an ongoing battle to remain on the ballot in [at least two states](#). In that context, the bomb threat isn't a mystery. It's a relatively anodyne side effect of a much larger problem.

This isn't sustainable. At some point, our political system will have to shift, either away from extremism or fully into authoritarianism. I tend to think that things will be some version of OK, but probably not soon, and definitely not this year. There is no clear Republican alternative to Trumpism, or even to Trump himself, who leads Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis by more than [50 points nationally](#).

and is ahead by double digits among primary voters in [Iowa](#), [South Carolina](#) and [New Hampshire](#). DeSantis' campaign struggles have [dented](#) his [popularity](#) in Florida, but that's unlikely to hinder his MAGA-friendly legislative agenda, analysts [told the Florida Phoenix](#).

That's less about DeSantis than about Florida, an [increasingly red state](#) governed by GOP supermajorities in both chambers of the legislature. Some of those lawmakers have started to [distance themselves](#) from DeSantis as he [flails along](#) the campaign trail, but they'll still support his policies — because those are *their* policies, too.

“It's not like you can expect to see a whole bunch of liberal stuff coming out of the Florida House and Senate anytime soon,” said Michael Binder, a political science professor at the University of North Florida.



*AWAKE, not WOKE, and also NOT WINNING, PROBABLY.
(Photo by Joe Raedle/Getty Images)*

Florida is a microcosm of the whole, in that Trumpism — and “anti-wokism,” and all of the other copycats — is a symptom of the problem, not the cause. Republicans have been flirting with the fringe [for decades](#), which is why the crazy will not end when Trump (eventually, mercifully) fades from view. It's also

why so many Republicans can't let go of Trump: He is the real-life manifestation of years of wishful thinking, resplendent in spray-tan orange and tantalizingly close to retaking the White House.

Republicans in Maine on Wednesday went nuclear in their attempt to keep him there, filing formal impeachment orders against Secretary of State Shenna Bellows for disqualifying Trump from the state's primary ballot, [the Maine Morning Star reported](#). That decision, based on [Bellows' interpretation](#) of an [anti-insurrection clause](#) in the U.S. Constitution, was "extraconstitutional" and also *extra partisan*, according to Senate Republican Leader Harold "Trey" Stewart.

Not that he's against partisanship, *per se*.

"[Bellows] is in fact, the best thing that Donald Trump has going for him right now, by helping to stir up our base and motivate our folks," Stewart told reporters Wednesday. "I can tell you that the Republican base remains incredibly energized over this."



"We decry your partisanship and will now use it to advance our own."

(Photo by Emma Davis/Maine Morning Star)

Bellows has the authority to determine ballot eligibility under Maine law, which

requires voters to file challenges with the secretary of state rather than in court. Republicans did not dispute her jurisdiction — a departure from the Trump legal team's [strategy](#) — but said her conclusion deprived Trump of due process, thereby violating the *rest* of the 14th Amendment. Also, it was a *partisan move*, designed to *grab headlines*, Stewart said Wednesday at the prearranged press conference to announce his impeachment gambit.

“She chose to go down this road in order to try to make national headlines for some sort of political agenda and future mission that she has,” he said with nary a whiff of irony or self-awareness.

Bellows, for her part, said the decision was based entirely on her “oath to uphold the Constitution and the rule of law.”

“Neither considerations for the political consequences nor my personal safety could or did enter into it,” she added.

The whole thing is a relatively moot point at the moment, as the decision remains on hold pending the outcome of an appeal [from the Trump campaign](#). The Maine Superior Court must issue a decision in [that case](#) by Jan. 17 to leave enough time for election officials to distribute ballots to voters ahead of the primary on Super Tuesday.

Trump lost the state in both 2016 and 2020. [As of September](#), he trailed President Joe Biden by 11 points among likely Maine voters.

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Caught Our Eye

A win for potatoes is a win for us all, and also for Idaho officials, who said a five-day trade mission to Mexico City in November went a long way toward establishing a potato “presence” in the country, [per the Idaho Capital Sun](#).



*Idaho Gov. Brad Little being welcomed at Central de Abastos by onion buyer Casa Chavez, because onions and potatoes are a perfect match!
(Photo via the Idaho Capital Sun)*

The trip was the latest step in a long journey of spud diplomacy. Idaho began making progress two years ago, convincing Mexico to accept fresh potato imports after years of accepting only frozen or dehydrated potatoes within 26 kilometers of the border. That changed in June 2022, when the country bowed to pressure from the National Potato Council and the Idaho Department of Agriculture. Since then, potato exports from Idaho to Mexico have increased by 60%.

“We were able to convince Mexico that U.S. potatoes would not be detrimental to their economic well-being,” said Ross Johnson, the Idaho Potato Commission’s vice president of retail and international.

November’s trip sought to build on that foundation by connecting with Mexican businesses to reinforce the trade partnership, according to [a press release](#) from Gov. Brad Little.



From The Newsrooms

- [Arkansas sees uptick in incarceration as crime drops slightly](#)
- [Should hospital guards carry guns? In New Hampshire, one state hospital says yes.](#)
- [Arguments over abortion-rights initiative set for Feb. before Florida Supreme Court](#)
- [Judges are now subject to preferred pronoun rule in Michigan](#)
- [‘Common sense for all of us’: Hundreds rally at Maine State House for gun reform](#)



One Last Thing

“Steamboat Willie”-era Mickey Mouse was [unmasked as the killer](#) in a horror movie trailer a day after entering the public domain. It’s always the one you least expect.

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