

News From The States

EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

Do you have questions about politics, elections, lawmakers, esoteric constitutional amendments that may determine the fate of the republic, and/or our collective slow descent into madness? Send them over to askkate@statesnewsroom.com, and I may answer them in an upcoming newsletter!

There is, in my documents folder, a running list of reasons I would be a terrible lawmaker. (My documents folder is a journey.) These range from the reasonable (“so many people would refuse to work with me because I have made fun of them in the newsletter”) to the absurd (“suits, [ugh](#)”), but most days, I think it boils down to this: The talking points are too cheesy, and I would never be able to deliver them with a straight face.

This is a bipartisan concern — politicians generally [struggle](#) to speak like normal humans — but it is, of late, much more of a Republican thing. Case in point: House Speaker Mike Johnson and the no good, very bad, horrible border bill.



The Big Takeaway

A bipartisan group of U.S. senators on Sunday released the much-anticipated text of a \$118 billion bill that would tie critical foreign aid to a massive overhaul of

the country's immigration system, [our D.C. bureau reported](#). The [370-page package](#) is likely to face a vote in the Senate [this week](#) despite mounting opposition in the House, where Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) [declared](#) it “dead on arrival.”



A house divided.
(Photo by Jennifer Shutt/States Newsroom)

The bill, negotiated over a four-month period by the White House and a mix of senators, includes billions in [supplementary aid](#) for Ukraine and Israel, which Republicans said they would not approve without new security measures to reduce [record-high crossings](#) at the U.S./Mexico border. The proposal has plenty of those provisions, including stricter criteria for migrants seeking asylum and a mechanism that would effectively close the border if daily crossings exceed certain caps. Republicans rejected it anyway.

“Let me be clear: The Senate Border Bill will NOT receive a vote in the House,” House Majority Leader Steve Scalise said Sunday. His opposition appeared to be rooted mostly in a [debunked GOP talking point](#), which claims that the bill would permit 5,000 illegal border crossings daily. That policy, according to Scalise, is “a

magnet for more illegal immigration.” (That policy, according to the bill, does not exist.)

In truth, there is no real reason for Republicans to oppose the bill. It is the harshest immigration proposal [in decades](#), endorsed by both congressional Democrats and the leader of their party, who speaks increasingly like a right-wing [immigration hardliner](#). It’s a no-brainer victory for the GOP — or it would be if the party were not so enamored with a different sort of no-brainer, by which I mean Donald Trump, who has staked his 2024 campaign largely on stoking fear about the border crisis and then [blaming it on President Joe Biden](#).

Clearly, that strategy becomes more difficult if Biden pulls off a bipartisan immigration reform deal, so Republicans have resolved to block the bill. The abrupt about-face is nothing new for right-wing lawmakers, who are forever happy to fall on the sword for Trump. But the resulting situation is messy. Because how do you blame Biden for the border crisis when you’re the ones stalling progress on the border crisis?



*“Border crisis” = families of human beings just trying to improve their lives.
(Photo by John Moore/Getty Images)*

The answer: Poorly! This is why you’ve got Johnson [claiming](#) that Biden should

act unilaterally on immigration instead of relying on Congress. It's why House Republicans [moved to impeach](#) Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas for failing to secure the border, even as Mayorkas worked with senators to craft the proposal to better secure the border. Even Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell did not escape the tension Sunday as he couched his support for the bill in criticism of Biden's "refusal to secure the border."

"The urgent humanitarian and security consequences affect every state," McConnell said [in a statement](#). "It is time to force the president to start cleaning up his mess and equip future leaders with a system that works and new emergency tools to restore order."

The Wall Street Journal had its own mess to clean up Sunday as Biden joined a growing chorus of criticism over [an op-ed piece](#) that described a predominantly Muslim Detroit-area suburb as "America's Jihad Capital." The commentary, penned by the head of an [anti-Muslim group](#), alleged that thousands of residents in Dearborn, including are siding with " Hamas against Israel and Iran against the U.S.," [the Michigan Advance reported](#).

It was not intended "to instigate any sort of hate," the author [told the Associated Press](#).



*Dearborn, Michigan.
(Photo by Getty Images)*

Yeah, but it did. Dearborn Mayor Abdullah Hammoud on Saturday [slammed the piece](#) as “reckless,” “bigoted” and “Islamophobic.” [Hours later](#), Hammoud blamed the “inflammatory” commentary for an “alarming increase in bigoted and Islamophobic rhetoric online targeting the city of Dearborn.” Police would “ramp up its presence across all places of worship and major infrastructure points,” he added.

Biden echoed the criticism a day later [on social media](#), cautioning Americans against “blaming a group of people based on the words of a small few.”

“That’s exactly what can lead to Islamophobia and anti-Arab hate, and it shouldn’t happen to the residents of Dearborn – or any American town,” he said. “We must continue to condemn hate in all forms.”

Residents in Dearborn have organized and held [multiple protests](#) of the war against Hamas by Israel, condemning the administration (and Biden specifically) for not embracing a cease-fire in Gaza. The most recent [rally](#), protesting ongoing Israeli military action, took place last week on the eve of Biden’s [campaign visit](#) to Michigan, roughly a week after [several](#) Arab American leaders, including Hammoud, declined to meet with Biden’s campaign manager.

An entirely different sort of “questionable content” could whittle school library collections in Indiana under a new law requiring school districts to review any reading material deemed offensive by parents, guardians or community members, [the Indiana Capital Chronicle reported](#).



Shelved.

(Photo by Casey Smith/Indiana Capital Chronicle)

Book challenges are historically rare in Indiana, according to [an analysis](#) by the Capital Chronicle and the Arnolt Center for Investigative Journalism. Just 17 districts received complaints about classroom and library materials in 2020, and only eight removed books, either by banning them altogether (six) or moving them to other libraries (two). In most cases, those decisions were drama-free, according to school documents. The Clark Pleasant School Corporation, for example, removed “l8r, g8r” by Lauren Myracle after determining that the book was “of poor quality, lacked the interest of students and had some questionable context for middle school.”

Districts [anticipate](#) more frequent complaints under the law, which requires school districts to have a procedure in place to respond to complaints about books deemed “obscene” or “harmful to minors.” Those requests must be reviewed [at public meetings](#) that also allow time for appeals, if necessary. [The policy](#), which took effect Jan. 1, also requires schools to maintain public catalogs of library materials.

None of this is groundbreaking, according to Diane Rogers, a librarian at Ben Davis Ninth Grade Center in Indianapolis and president of the Indiana Library Federation. Most libraries already have public catalogs, challenge procedures and collection development policies in place, she said. Usually, they're based on standards set by the American Library Association, which recommends reading a book in its entirety or consulting professional review sources before adding materials to the collection.

Book lists published by conservative groups like Moms For Liberty "would not, however, be considered professional resources," she added.

"You have to sort of use your professional judgment when you're looking at whether you purchase something. We look at the age of the characters within the story, for example. Is it going to fit into our community? Perhaps it's more mature for high schoolers than those in middle school," Rogers said. "These are important topics that you have to make decisions on, but that's another reason why it's so important to have a certified, professionally trained, qualified librarian on staff."

Important topics:

- [As few as 1 in 5 voters could defeat initiative petitions under Missouri Senate proposal](#)
- [Rhode Island voters usually say yes to bond issues. Are local and state officials taking them for granted?](#)
- [How 'that' and 'which' can profoundly alter an Alabama law](#)
- [Declaring conflicts of interest rare for North Dakota lawmakers](#)



Gun Violence

Mass shootings are now frequent enough to sustain an entire industry devoted to helping law enforcement officers train for them, Stateline reported. In San Diego, there's Strategic Operations, a company run by former Hollywood producers and military combat veterans. In North Carolina, there's a 60,000-square-foot reality-based simulation training facility at Wake Technical Community College. And in Texas, there's the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training Center, considered by law enforcement as the national standard for active shooting

scenarios, [Stateline reported](#).



*THIS IS A SIMULATION.
(Photo by Matt Vasilogambros/Stateline)*

Simulations have long been a critical part of first responder and police training, particularly for mass casualty events like natural disasters. But mass shooting simulations are a different breed. As mass shootings become [more common](#), simulations have become more realistic, with visceral sound effects, trained actors, pyrotechnics, and, sometimes, virtual reality. They've also become more expensive, which officials said is simply the cost of adequately preparing officers to respond to active shooters, triage victims and coordinate among agencies in a chaotic environment.

“If we can provide these trainings that are as close to the real-life event as possible, you will actually induce that same kind of stress and the reaction that you might have during a real-life incident,” said Sgt. Colin Hebler, who works in the Infrastructure Security Group within the San Diego County Sheriff’s Department. “If it does happen, we’re going to be prepared. We don’t want this to be one of those catastrophic events that comes out on the news, and everyone says, ‘Well, the law enforcement messed up.’”

Because: Law enforcement often does mess up. Last month, the U.S. Department of Justice excoriated the police response to a 2022 shooting at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, where 21 people were murdered. Nineteen of them were children. First responders waited for 77 minutes outside of fourth grade classrooms before confronting the active shooter, a catastrophic failure that cost lives, according to the [DOJ report](#).

Simulations mimic that environment — the sights, the sounds, the smells – in hopes of preventing those mistakes, experts said.

“It doesn’t matter if you’re the first officer or by yourself or there’s 20 of you, you go in and you stop the shooter, and then you start trying to help the people who’ve been injured,” said Jaclyn Schildkraut, executive director of the Regional Gun Violence Research Consortium at New York’s Rockefeller Institute of Government. “Simulations are really about acclimating you to what you might encounter on that given day, so that you are able to maintain that focus and subsequently, your safety, as best as possible.”

Safety first:

- [Guns and mental health records: How New Hampshire bill would change background checks](#)
- [New Mexico House Republican lawmakers say they need Democratic allies to stop gun legislation proposals](#)
- [Michigan lawmakers attend White House event centered on gun violence responses](#)
- [\(New Hampshire\) ‘It was genuinely one of the worst moments of my life’](#)



From The Newsrooms

Gov & Politics

- [Biden rallies Democrats in Las Vegas: ‘Imagine the nightmare’ if Trump reelected](#)
- [Rallies planned at Florida Supreme Court; justices ready to vet pivotal](#)
- [Arizona Republicans are still trying to protect attorneys behind bogus election lawsuits from punishment](#)
- [Tribal citizens in Nevada can now vote with EASE](#)

Education

- [Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer continues to champion pre-K for all kids to give them a ‘real shot at a great life’](#)
- [Consultants who help prevent pre-K expulsions and suspensions in Washington seek more state support](#)
- [\(New Mexico\) Rep. Lente moving forward tribal education fund bill with Navajo Nation government concerns in mind](#)
- [Kansas Senate bill offers boundaries for challenges aimed at sanitizing library collections](#)

Healthcare

- [Idaho’s COVID data set for disruption after state lawmakers reject millions in federal aid](#)
- [More than 100K Kansans could be booted from Medicaid by end of redetermination process](#)
- [After classmate’s overdose death, Durango students inspire Narcan bill at Colorado Legislature](#)
- [‘It Just Happens Here:’ Montana grapples with barriers to mental health care](#)



One Last Thing

I really thought the Super Bowl was yesterday (college football only, please and thank you), but apparently I was wrong, so here is [an article](#) about advertisers choosing to “play it safe” with commercials in hopes of avoiding social media backlash. PSA: Someone will still be mad [about something](#).

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