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AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION

Tracy Thayer
Tracy Thayer
Not specified
Po Box 155
Brooktondale NY 14817-0155

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Stakes still high in more subdued 2025 elections

Voters get first chance to weigh in on Trump 2.0

Savannah Kuchar
USA TODAY

More than 150 million Americans cast a ballot in last year's election that put President Donald Trump back in the White House and saw Democrats in Congress suffer serious setbacks.

While 2025 may be more subdued in comparison, the year is not lacking for key races with national significance.

A series of special elections in a handful of states has seen down-on-their-luck Democrats faring well, including flipping state Senate seats in Iowa and Pennsylvania.

"That ought to energize Democrats that there's still some life left in the party, despite them being kind of at sea in Washington," said Barry Burden, a political science professor and director of the Elections Research Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The outcome has Democrats feeling good, but experts say the real tests are yet to come, starting with a heated Wisconsin state Supreme Court race on Tuesday and a pair of special elections for U.S. House seats in northern Florida to fill vacancies created during the Trump transition.

Later this year, voters in Virginia and New Jersey will also be tasked with picking new governors, as the incumbents in both states face term limits.

Wisconsin and Florida

On Tuesday, Wisconsin voters will go to the polls to decide if Trump-backed judge Brad Schimel or liberal circuit court judge Susan Crawford will fill the vacated seventh seat on the state's Supreme Court.

Florida also has two big races on Tuesday: One special election will fill the seat vacated by Matt Gaetz, who resigned in November when Trump nominated him to be attorney general; the winner of the other will be the replacement for Mike Waltz, who left Congress to become Trump's national security adviser.

Both Sunshine State districts favor Republicans, though recent reports show the GOP candidates lagging in fundraising and Democratic leaders making noise like they could score an upset.

"I think we're going to overperform expectations," in Florida, Ken Martin, the chair of the Democratic National Committee, told USA TODAY. "And there's certainly a chance we could win."

On Friday, Trump acknowledged Democrats are outspending Republican candidates in Florida by many multiples.

"So the airwaves are blanketed, and you never know what happens in a case like that," the president told reporters in the Oval Office.

In Wisconsin, the race to determine whether the state's highest court leans liberal or conservative on issues from abortion to redistricting has become an expensive one.

Billionaire Trump ally Elon Musk has put about $20 million toward boosting Schimel. Spending from the two parties combined has already broken records for the country's most expensive court race and could exceed $100 million.

Musk's outsized contribution – about 10 times that of Democratic donor George Soros – reflects the importance and expectations of this election, Burden said.

"He has kind of electrified the race and connected it even more than it already was to the Trump administration," Burden said.

Musk has cited his opposition to "activist judges" as his cause for concern, while his opponents point to a pending lawsuit by his electric vehicle company, Tesla, against the state of Wisconsin.

"But," Burden told USA TODAY, "I think the more important factors are the symbolic importance of the race – whether it is viewed as essentially ratifying the new conservative agenda in Washington in the key battleground state or whether it's a rebuke of what's happening in Washington."

Democrats eye this week optimistically

If Republicans are hoping to defend their purported mandate, Democrats are looking to score high-profile wins after a rough conclusion to 2024.

Among the big names orbiting the Wisconsin contest is Tim Walz, the Democratic governor of neighboring Minnesota, who has also been touring the country since being on the losing side of the 2024 election as Kamala Harris' running mate.

The 60-year-old Walz has dusted off his campaign shoes to stump for Crawford, a sign of how important Democrats see this race while seeking positive headlines since last November.

Walz, who has left open the door on mounting a 2028 White House campaign, said Wisconsin remains a bellwether for the rest of the country on economic issues and representing middle-American values. But he also said it may have become a "laboratory of the worst of what happens" due to special-interest money that has poured into the state's elections, including judicial contests that are supposed to be nonpartisan.

"This is just stunning to me that a Supreme Court seat will run into close to $100 million," Walz told USA TODAY.

"And so look, I didn't want to have to get involved in a Supreme Court seat," Walz added. "But I was over there advocating that Judge Crawford is for rule of law – not for Democrats, but for rule of law."

Governor races in N.J., Va.

Come November, two states will have picked their new governors.

Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin, a Republican, and New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, a Democrat, both face term limits this year, leaving their positions up for grabs.

But first comes the primary elections in June. Virginia Democrat Abigail Spanberger is currently unopposed, and though Republican Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears has a few GOP challengers, she is largely favored to win this summer.

If Spanberger or Earle-Sears wins in November, the commonwealth would have its first female governor.

In New Jersey, the primary field is much more crowded. On the Democratic side, U.S. Rep. Josh Gottheimer and former Rep. Mikie Sherrill are in the mix. Among Republicans, state Assemblyman Jack Ciattarelli and former radio host Bill Spadea lead a pack of contenders.

Virginia's odd-year campaign has often been referred to as a national bellwether since it's one of the first elections on the heels of a presidential race. But Burden says that reputation might be outdated.

"I think Virginia probably gets more attention than it deserves," he said. "It used to be more of a battleground state, so it really was viewed as kind of a signal of the feelings of the country. It's now become reliably enough blue that it's meaningful when a Republican like Youngkin wins."

New Jersey tends to lean even bluer, though the state did elect Republican Chris Christie as its governor for two terms in back-to-back elections a year after Barack Obama won the White House in both 2008 and 2012.

"State Republicans in Virginia and New Jersey are in a strong position because they have demonstrated their commitment to legislating a positive path forward, while Democrats continue to block progress," Mason Di Palma, communications director for the Republican State Leadership Committee, said in a statement.

What it may mean for 2026

Despite the initial positive outcomes for Democrats in 2025, Burden cautioned that might not directly translate to a successful 2026.

In part, he said, it's because the Democratic base is shifting toward college-educated voters who tend to show up more in odd-year elections. An NBC exit poll of voters in 10 key states last year found 56% of college graduates voted Democratic; the same percentage of voters without a college degree voted Republican.

Since being Harris' running mate, Walz has been touring the country talking to voters about how Democrats can regain a foothold. He said local elections can serve as a reset for the party that is out of power in Washington, but that whatever happens on Tuesday, Democrats still have a larger challenge of connecting with voters on the national level.

"It's a different electorate that shows up for midterms and special elections," Walz said.

"If you're going to get out on April 1 and cast a vote on a special election for a Supreme Court seat in the state of Wisconsin, you're paying attention closer," Walz added. "What we have yet to crack is on these presidential elections, and especially with Trump, there is a whole new electorate out there that's not hearing that message."

Martin, elected to lead the DNC last month, said the party is doing what it can now to build infrastructure across states and districts.

"Look, the only thing we can do at this moment as Democrats is, because we don't have power in Washington ... is to win elections," Martin said. "We're seeing a lot of energy right now throughout the country. Of course if that energy continues through this year and into '26, that will bode well for Democrats."

Contributing: Phillip Bailey, USA TODAY

Trump's protocols caused concerns before Signal chat

Erin Mansfield
USA TODAY

President Donald Trump and his administration raised eyebrows about how they handled sensitive national security information long before his top national security adviser added a journalist to a Signal chat.

Security experts say sharing detailed plans for attacking the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen with a journalist from the Atlantic is part of a larger problem involving Trump and his security team's overall handling of sensitive information.

"The sloppiness of their security is pervasive," Kori Schake, a senior fellow at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, told USA TODAY. Schake said CIA Director John Ratcliffe and Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard's claims that the time, date, and weapons used were not classified information is "staggering."

Mike Williams, an international relations professor at Syracuse University who has consulted the Department of Defense, said repeated national security lapses can create a culture of complacency at best or neglect at worse.

"Or it creates a culture whereby this becomes permissible and then you have more and more such leakages and then it's only a matter of time before something gets out there," Williams said.

The White House did not respond to a request for comment on Trump's record on information security.

"It is something that is not a big deal other than you want to find out who did it and how they did it because you don't want it to happen in the future," Trump said last week about Atlantic editor-in-chief Jeffrey Goldberg being added to the Signal chat where Vice President JD Vance and Cabinet members planned the attack.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said Wednesday: "The real story here is the overwhelming success of President Trump's decisive military action."

Here is a look at other times that Trump's handling of sensitive national security information raised concerns.

Less than a month into his first term in 2017, Trump took a phone call about a North Korean missile launch while sitting in the middle of a dining area at Mar-a-Lago, according to CNN. He was sitting next to the prime minister of Japan, while club members "looked on from their tables."

In 2017, the Washington Post revealed that Trump shared highly classified intelligence on the Islamic State with Russia.

The intelligence came from Israel, one of the U.S.'s top allies, and Trump said he shared facts but quickly denied ever naming Israel as the source.

In 2018, a New York Times investigation revealed that Russian and Chinese spies were routinely listening to his calls to old friends via a specific iPhone of Trump's. Trump said he had "one seldom used government phone" and called the report "so incorrect I do not have time to correct it."

Trump overruled intelligence officials in 2018 to grant his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, a top secret security clearance, according to the New York Times and the Washington Post. Trump's chief of staff at the time, John Kelly, documented the request in an internal memo because he was so uncomfortable with the situation, the reports said.

Shortly after winning the November 2024 election, Trump spoke with Russian President Vladimir Putin and about 70 other world leaders, the Washington Post reported. The calls raised alarms in the foreign policy community because he spoke directly with the leaders, without secure phone lines set up, without staff from the State Department, and without government interpreters.

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New map to highlight rip current risk

National Hurricane Center launching it as part of storm forecasts

Dinah Voyles Pulver
USA TODAY



Many of country's surf zone fatalities occur when distant hurricanes send swells to shore that create dangerous conditions at the coast, such as strong surf and rip currents, the National Hurricane Center said.
DAMON HUGHES/PALM BEACH DAILY NEWS FILE

When a hurricane approaches the U.S., forecasts for high winds and intense rain often grab the attention, but rip currents – even from faraway storms – also present a deadly hazard.

To place additional focus on that threat, the National Hurricane Center is launching a new rip current risk map during the season that starts June 1 to highlight the risks. The graphic will be presented with the center's other forecast products when a tropical storm or hurricane approaches.

Fatalities in the surf zone, including from rip currents, have increased in the U.S.: An average of 88 people died each year in surf zone fatalities between 2020 and 2023, compared with about 60 a year during the previous decade, according to National Weather Service data.

Rip currents are fast flowing streams of water that form perpendicular to the beach. They form when rough surf, often associated with offshore storms, digs out channels in the sandy surface below the water. When waves wash in, the water flows out through the channels in strong currents that can surprise swimmers and waders and swiftly carry them away from the beach.

Already this year, the weather service has reported 14 deaths related to high surf, rip currents and other surf zone hazards.

Many of the surf zone fatalities occur when distant hurricanes send swells to shore that create dangerous conditions at the coast, such as strong surf and rip currents, the hurricane center stated.

"Sadly, we've lost nearly 80 people in the United States since 2013 to deadly rip currents and heavy surf caused by hurricanes and tropical storms," said Robbie Berg, warning coordination meteorologist for the hurricane center.

"Many of these occurred when people went to enjoy a beautiful summer day at the beach, unaware that a hurricane located hundreds or even thousands of miles offshore over the Atlantic could still cause dangerous rip currents along the coast," he said.

The center will provide the rip current risk information from local National Weather Service offices when an active tropical system is present.

"Having this new NWS rip current risk map on hurricanes.gov will help people understand when it might be too dangerous to get in the ocean – even if a hurricane is not right on our doorstep," Berg said.

The map, designed to be easy for beachgoers to view, will show the risks for the current day, the next day, and the highest risks over both days for the East and Gulf coasts of the U.S., Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands and southern California. The maps will not provide specific information on surf heights.

Any increased attention to rip current risks is a good thing, said officials in Panama City Beach, Florida. The coastal community has experienced a surge in rip current deaths over the past two years.

The city and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration have used offshore sensors to help monitor beach conditions, said Stuart Tettemer, the mayor of Panama City Beach. "NOAA's data collection and modeling are used and enhanced by local, expert observation to keep beachgoers as safe as possible from rip currents."

The United States Lifesaving Association is also pleased to see the additional warning.

"Over 80% of the rescues by lifeguards at surf beaches are due to rip currents," said Chris Brewster, chair of the association's national certification committee. "Early public warning of the likelihood of rips could save lives."

Regardless of conditions, Brewster issued this reminder: "Always swim near a lifeguard."

What to do if caught in a rip current

- Relax: Rip currents pull you out, not under.
- Swim parallel to the beach and not against the current.
- Float or tread water until you escape the current or are rescued.
- Draw attention to yourself by yelling and waving.

How to avoid being caught in a rip current

- Always swim at a lifeguard-protected beach.
- Check conditions before entering the water.
- Learn to identify rip currents.
- Ask hotels and rental companies where to find the closest lifeguard-protected beach.

Judge: Deportation of Maryland man 'lawless'

Federal lawyers say they have no power to get him out of Salvadoran prison

Eduardo Cuevas
USA TODAY

A federal judge said the Trump administration confessed to a "grievous error" by mistakenly deporting a Maryland father to a notorious Salvadoran megaprison, where the risk of his harm "shocks the conscience."

In an order Sunday, U.S. District Judge Paula Xinis of Maryland pushed back on claims by Justice Department lawyers that they have no power to bring Kilmar Abrego Garcia, 29, back from El Salvador's Terrorism Confinement Center. Xinis' 22-page order expanded on her brief ruling Friday ordering Abrego Garcia's release before midnight on Monday. It rejected the Justice Department's request to halt her order as government lawyers petitioned a federal appeals court to review it.

"There were no legal grounds for his arrest, detention or removal" or evidence that Abrego Garcia was wanted for crimes in El Salvador, Xinis wrote on Sunday. "Rather, his detention appears wholly lawless."

Abrego Garcia had complied fully with all directives from immigration officials, including annual check-ins, and had never been charged with or convicted of any crime, the judge wrote.

Still, in mid-March, the Trump administration deported Abrego Garcia, a Salvadoran migrant who lives in Maryland with his family, accusing him of ties to the MS-13 gang, which he has denied. There are no pending charges and his lawyers have denied the allegation.

In her order, Xinis said government lawyers had the chance to present evidence of alleged ties but didn't.

Government lawyers acknowledged in previous court filings that the Trump administration erroneously deported Abrego Garcia to his home country despite a previous court order prohibiting his removal. The lawyers then argued the U.S., including Xinis, had no power to get him out of the Salvadoran prison.

"As defendants acknowledge, they had no legal authority to arrest him, no justification to detain him, and no grounds to send him to El Salvador – let alone deliver him into one of the most dangerous prisons in the Western Hemisphere," she said. "Having confessed grievous error, the defendants now argue that this Court lacks the power to hear this case, and they lack the power to order Abrego Garcia's return. For the following reasons, their jurisdictional arguments fail as a matter of law."

The Trump administration has faced criticism in the U.S. courts and elsewhere for its stepped-up enforcement against immigration rights. A judge in Washington, D.C., is separately weighing whether the Trump administration violated a court order not to deport alleged Venezuelan gang members amid ongoing legal proceedings. Some of those deported have active asylum cases, and civil rights groups have argued the administration has failed to provide due process under the law.

However, Attorney General Pam Bondi on Sunday vowed to continue the administration's deportations.

"The best thing to do is to get these people out of our country," she said.

On Saturday, the Department of Justice placed on leave one of its top immigration lawyers one day after he questioned in court the Trump administration's handling of the deportation.

Contributing: Joey Garrison, USA TODAY; Reuters

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Schools

Continued from Page 1A

U.S. News' best overall business schools

Here's which business schools made it into U.S. News' top five:

1. The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania
2. Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management
3. Stanford University
4. The University of Chicago Booth School of Business
5. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sloan School of Management

U.S. News' best business schools in New York

Here's which New York business schools made it on U.S. News' list:

- No. 6: **New York University** Stern School of Business, tied with two other schools
- No. 9: **Columbia University**
- No. 15: **Cornell University**'s Samuel Curtis Johnson Graduate School of Management
- No. 32: **University of Rochester**'s Simon Business School, tied with the University of Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business
- No. 54: **Syracuse University**'s Whitman School of Management, tied with three other schools
- No. 58: **Fordham University**'s Gabelli School of Business, tied with The Spears School of Business as Oklahoma State University
- No. 61: **Baruch College**'s Zicklin School of Business, tied with three other schools
- No. 79: **University at Buffalo**, tied with two other schools
- No. 87: **Binghamton University**
- No. 92: **Canisius University**'s Richard J. Wehle School of Business, tied with two other schools
- No. 100: **Clarkson University**'s David D. Reh School of Business, **Rochester Institute of Technology**'s Saunders College of Business and two other schools
- No. 120: **Pace University**'s Lubin School of Business, tied with Texas State University's McCoy College of Business
- No. 122-133: **University at Albany**

For the full business school listings, visit: usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-business-schools/mba-rankings.

U.S. News' best overall law schools

Here's which law schools made it into U.S. News' top five:

1. **Stanford University** (tie for 1st)
2. **Yale University** (tie for 1st)
3. **University of Chicago**
4. **University of Virginia**
5. **University of Pennsylvania**'s Penn Carey Law School

U.S. News' best law schools in New York

Here's which New York law schools made it on U.S. News' list:

- No. 8: **New York University**, tied with University of Michigan — Ann Arbor
- No. 10: **Columbia University**, tied with Northwestern University's Pritzker School of Law
- No. 18: **Cornell University**, tied with University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- No. 38: **Fordham University**, tied with four other schools
- No. 63: **St. John's University**, **Yeshiva University**'s Cardozo School of Law and three other schools
- No. 94: **University at Buffalo**, tied with four other schools
- No 107: **Syracuse University**, tied with seven other schools
- No. 117: **Albany Law School**, **Brooklyn Law School** and two other schools
- No. 121: **New York Law School**, tied with three other schools
- No. 125: Maurice A. Deane School of Law at **Hofstra University**, tied with the Franklin Pierce School of Law at the University of New Hampshire
- No. 141: **Pace University**, tied with four other schools
- No. 156: **CUNY School of Law**, tied with Santa Clara University
- No. 169: **Touro University**'s Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center, tied with four other schools

For the full law school listings, visit: usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-law-schools/law-rankings.

U.S. News' best medical schools for research

Medical schools were split into four tiers based on their research productivity, faculty and admissions data in U.S. News' list. Here's which medical schools were included in the ranking:

- Baylor College of Medicine
- Case Western Reserve University
- Emory University
- **Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra University/Northwell Health**
- Mayo Clinic Alix School of Medicine
- Ohio State University
- University of California — Los Angeles' David Geffen School of Medicine
- University of California — San Diego
- University of California — San Francisco
- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- University of Pittsburgh
- **University of Rochester**
- USF Health's Morsani College of Medicine at the University of South Florida
- University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center
- Vanderbilt University
- Yale University

Here's which New York medical schools were included in U.S. News' Tier 2 ranking:

- Renaissance School of Medicine at **Stony Brook University**
- Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at the **University at Buffalo**

For the full medical school listings, visit: usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-medical-schools/research-rankings.

U.S. News' best overall engineering schools

Here's which engineering schools made it into U.S. News' top five:

1. Massachusetts Institute of Technology
2. Stanford University
3. University of California - Berkeley
4. Georgia Institute of Technology
5. California Institute of Technology

U.S. News' best engineering schools in New York

Here's which New York engineering schools made it on U.S. News' list:

- No. 12: **Cornell University**
- No. 18: **Columbia University**'s Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science, tied with two other schools
- No. 42: **New York University**'s Tandon School of Engineering
- No. 43: **University of Rochester**'s Hajim School of Engineering & Applied Sciences, tied with three other schools
- No. 49: **Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute**, tied with two other schools
- No. 57: **University at Buffalo**
- No. 64: **Stony Brook University**, tied with four other schools
- No. 69: **Rochester Institute of Technology**'s Kate Gleason College of Engineering, tied with two other schools
- No. 111: **Syracuse University**, tied with five other schools
- No. 117: **Binghamton University**'s Thomas J. Watson College of Engineering and Applied Science, tied with two other schools
- No. 120: **The City College of New York**'s The Grove School of Engineering, tied with four other schools
- No. 158: **University at Albany**, tied with Portland State University's Maseeh College of Engineering and Computer Science
- No. 163: **Clarkson University**'s Wallace H. Coulter School of Engineering, tied with two other schools
- No. 181-198: **Alfred University** — NYS College of Ceramics, Inamori School of Engineering

For the full engineering school listings, visit: usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-engineering-schools/eng-rankings.

U.S. News' best overall nursing schools for master's programs

Here's which nursing schools made it into U.S. News' top five:

1. Emory University's Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing
2. Johns Hopkins University
3. Ohio State University
4. Vanderbilt University
5. Duke University

U.S. News' best nursing schools for master's programs in New York

Here's which New York nursing schools made it on U.S. News' list:

- No. 9: **New York University**'s Rory Meyers College of Nursing, tied with the University of California — Los Angeles
- No. 15: **University of Rochester**
- No. 34: **Pace University**'s Lienhard School of Nursing, St. John Fisher University and five other schools
- No. 43: **Hunter College**'s Bellevue School of Nursing, tied with three other schools
- No. 73: **Hofstra University**, tied with two other schools
- No. 84: **Adelphi University**, tied with three other schools
- No. 97: **Mercy University**, tied with Marymount University
- No. 101: **Molloy University**'s Barbara H. Hagan School of Nursing and Health Sciences
- No. 103: **Binghamton University**'s Decker College of Nursing and Health Sciences
- No. 111: **SUNY Polytechnic Institute**, tied with three other schools
- No. 115: **American University of Beirut**'s Rafic Hariri School of Nursing, **Wagner College** and one other school
- No. 127: **LeMoyne College**
- No. 134-146: **CUNY — College of Staten Island**, **Daemen University**, **Dominican University New York**, **D'Youville University**'s Patricia H. Garman School of Nursing, **Russell Sage College** and **St. Joseph's University**

For the full nursing school for master's programs listings, visit: usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-nursing-schools/nur-rankings.

U.S. News' best overall graduate education schools

Here's which graduate education schools made it into U.S. News' top five:

1. University of Wisconsin — Madison
2. **Columbia University**'s Teachers College (tied for 2nd)
3. University of Michigan — Ann Arbor's Marsal Family School of Education (tied for 2nd)
4. Vanderbilt University's Peabody College (tied for 2nd)
5. University of California — Los Angeles

U.S. News' best graduate education schools in New York

Here's which New York graduate education schools made it on U.S. News' list:

- No. 6: **New York University**'s Steinhardt, tied with seven schools
- No. 54: **University at Buffalo**, tied with six schools
- No. 81: **Syracuse University**, tied with eight schools
- No. 100: **University at Albany**, **University at Rochester**'s Warner School of Education and six other schools
- No. 114: **Binghamton University**, tied with 10 other schools
- No. 138: **St. John's University**, tied with eight other schools
- No. 207: **Hofstra University**, tied with Gallaudet University
- No. 222: **Molloy University**, tied with five other schools
- No. 234-258: **D'Youville University**

For the full graduate education school listings, visit: usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-education-schools/edu-rankings.

Contributing: USA TODAY Network - Florida reporter C.A. Bridges

Emily Barnes reports on consumer-related issues for the USA TODAY Network's New York Connect Team, focusing on scam and recall-related topics. Follow her on X and Insta-



Dozens of New York colleges and universities, including Syracuse University, shown here, have some of the best graduate programs in the country, newly released rankings by U.S. News & World Report show. TAR HEELS WIRE

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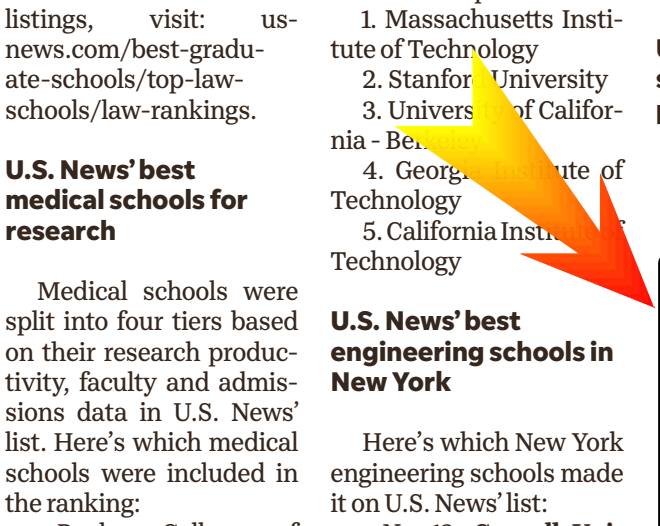
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Higher education fight in new phase

Other university leaders back Harvard's stance against White House

Zachary Schermele
USA TODAY



Demonstrators rally on April 12 in a protest organized by the city of Cambridge, Massachusetts, calling on Harvard University to resist interference by the federal government. NICHOLAS PFOSI/REUTERS

WASHINGTON – When Harvard University first rebuked the Trump administration April 14 amid efforts to force changes to its campus, other powerful universities were quick to come to its defense.

"Harvard's objections," wrote Stanford University's president and provost the next day, "are rooted in the American tradition of liberty, a tradition essential to our country's universities, and worth defending."

"Princeton stands with Harvard," said the president of the school's New Jersey counterpart.

Even the acting president of Columbia University – another Ivy League university, which has unsuccessfully tried to oblige similar government demands – seemed to offer her support to Harvard. President Donald Trump's recent directives, she wrote, "would strike at the very heart of that university's venerable mission."

The escalation signaled the start of a new, more combative phase in Trump's efforts to reshape the nation's colleges.

"I applaud Harvard University standing up for the shared values of higher education," said Michael Roth, the president of Wesleyan University, a private liberal arts college in Connecticut. "Federal funding for universities must not depend on a loyalty oath."

As court battles over slashed research funding, student visa revocations and diversity programs have played out quietly, universities have struggled to present a more vocal, unified front against Trump. Every school is different, and some have been more amenable than others to new kinds of federal oversight.

Within hours of Harvard's defiance, the administration froze more than $2.2 billion in federal funding for Harvard. In the days that followed, it began exploring ways to revoke Harvard's tax-exempt status, threatened the university's ability to enroll international students and accused it of inaccurately disclosing sources of foreign money.

Trump took to social media April 15 to threaten the university's nonprofit status – a move that is now reportedly being considered in earnest by the Internal Revenue Service.

Rescinding Harvard's tax-exempt status would be unprecedented, likely costing the school at least hundreds of millions of dollars in federal income taxes. But Trump can't "simply snap his fingers" and make the change, according to Michael Dorf, a law professor at Cornell University.

The effort would surely prompt a challenge in court, where Harvard would have the upper hand legally, he said.

"There is a deep body of IRS regulations and case law making clear that all sorts of controversial statements and activities by universities do not forfeit their tax-exempt status," he said.

Since Trump took office, many college leaders have watched in despair as his administration has upended the public-private partnership that forms the basis of American academic research. In a matter of months, the federal government has exerted unprecedented pressure on institutions, pausing or outright canceling billions in funding while pushing schools to overhaul their admissions, hiring and teaching practices.

"They want to be seen as attacking campuses," said Jon Fansmith, the senior vice president for government relations at the American Council on Education, during an April 15 webinar with college officials. "What they don't want to do is solve any problems."

The Trump administration has repeatedly denounced [illegible] antisemitism on college campuses, including Harvard's, in the wake of protests sparked by the Israel-Hamas war. Federal funding, his administration has argued, must be contingent on universities following civil rights laws and curbing antisemitic incidents.

Not long after Trump attacked Harvard online, Kristi Noem, his Homeland Security secretary, wrote a letter to the university threatening to imperil its ability to enroll foreign students.

"With anti-American, pro-Hamas ideology poisoning its campus and classrooms, Harvard's position as a top institution of higher learning is a distant memory," Noem said in a statement.

Yet even the Anti-Defamation League suggested that the White House is exerting too much influence over the nation's colleges.

"Denying federal funds (whether in part or in total) is an extremely serious and rightfully rare punishment that should be used only in the most severe situations with institutions incapable or unwilling to improve," Jonathan Greenblatt, the organization's CEO, said in a statement April 18.

Higher ed's detractors, meanwhile, watched gleefully as the White House doubled down on its punishment for schools that choose to disobey its orders.

On April 18, the federal Education Department lobbed yet another accusation Harvard's way: The agency said the school has been inaccurately disclosing foreign gifts and contracts. Linda McMahon, the Education secretary, ordered the university to cough up troves of documents for review.

Newton, Harvard's spokesperson, said the university has filed its necessary disclosure reports "for decades as part of its ongoing compliance with the law."

International students make up about a third of Harvard's student population. At Harvard and many other universities, the enrollment of foreign students, who usually pay full tuition, often subsidizes many other expenses, including financial aid for domestic students.

The federal government has never before jeopardized a major university's enrollment of students from other countries.

To James Kvaal, who served as the top official overseeing higher education in the Biden administration, it's unclear why a White House so focused on reducing trade deficits would target international students. They brought in more than $40 billion to the U.S. economy last year.

"Economically, it's an export," he said. "This is a service we're selling."

In a statement to USA TODAY on April 18, Harvard spokesperson Jason Newton said the school stands by its original statement defending academic freedom.

"We will continue to comply with the law and expect the administration to do the same," he said.

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Tuesday, April 22, the 112th day of 2025. There are 253 days left in the year. On this date in:

1616: Spanish author Miguel de Cervantes died at age 68 in Madrid. He was thought to have succumbed to complications of diabetes. Cervantes spent most of his life in poverty until he found success in "Don Quixote."

1864: Congress adopted the Coinage Act of 1864, which permitted the inscription "In God We Trust" on the one- and two-cent coins. The phrase eventually made its way to paper currency.

1889: During the Land Rush of 1889, an estimated 50,000 people lined up to claim land in what is now known as Oklahoma. Two million acres of land were up for grabs. Around 11,000 homesteads were established. The land was originally part of Native American territory after various tribes were forced to relocate to the area from their ancestral homes.

1904: American theoretical physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer was born. He was director of the Manhattan Project's Los Alamos Lab in New Mexico. Called the father of the atomic bombs, his weapons were used during World War II in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan.

1915: The first use of chemical warfare, chlorine gas, was released in the Second Battle of Ypres in Belgium during World War I. More than 150 tons of the lethal gas was released onto the French army along the Western Front by the Germans.

1945: Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler publicly admitted for the first time that Germany could not win World War II and his murderous goal of the Third Reich was over. Hitler's next step, suicide, would come April 30 with Soviet troops storming Berlin.

1954: Live televised coverage began of the Army-McCarthy hearings, which arose from accusations of the Army tolerating communism by Senator Joseph McCarthy.

1970: Millions of people across the nation joined together in various events to celebrate the first Earth Day. The event was the creation of Sen. Gaylord Nelson, an environmental conservationist who wanted to bring the issue of ecological preservation into the spotlight.

1992: Ten gas explosions erupted in the downtown district of Guadalajara, Mexico. The explosions caused fires that consumed almost 5 miles of streets. The catastrophe killed between 200 to 1000 people. As estimated 500 to 600 people went missing. About 15,000 were left homeless.

1994: Former President Richard Nixon died at age 81 from a stroke. Nixon's presidency was complex but marred by the Watergate scandal. He was the only president to resign from office.

2016: The Paris Agreement opened for signatures in New York City. The pact to battle global warming has been joined by 195 parties. A goal of the agreement was to keep the global temperature below 2 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels and prevent further global temperature increases.

– Hoang Tran, USA TODAY Network

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