

CT Insider investigation spurs Blumenthal chatbot protections bill

By Ella Napack
STAFF WRITER

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., is crossing the aisle to join with Republican Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo, this past week to announce bipartisan legislation that aims to protect children from AI chatbots.

The bill is aimed at the tech companies that have created AI chatbot companion services, apps and

websites that allow users to have emotional relationships with AI chatbots on the other side of a text message exchange.

A CT Insider investigation earlier this year found that students in Connecticut were ‘dating’ AI chatbot companions, and that the companies behind the chatbots were targeting kids with advertising and pushing sexually explicit conversations to minor users.

“I’m using the article as ‘Exhibit A’ in this effort to elevate the issue,” Blumenthal said in an interview this past week. “Connecticut is front and center in this.”

The bill would require that the tech companies that make AI chatbots institute periodic age verification processes, require that the chatbots disclose that they are not human and prohibit any minor use of AI companion

chatbots. Making chatbots that promote self harm, suicide or sexual violence would be made a criminal offense.

Failure to adhere to these guidelines could be punishable for up to \$100,000 in civil penalties per offense, the bill outlines.

CT Insider reported in May that middle school students in Fairfield and Ellington were having romantic or sexual relation-

ships with AI chatbots. In a Fairfield middle school, a group of middle school girls were using an app called Talkie AI to have romantic relationships with chatbots they called “AI boyfriends.”

CT Insider tested chatbots on the services Character.ai, Chai AI, Takie, Polybuzz and Replika and found that all engaged in explicit content with users who identified as middle school aged.



NurPhoto via Getty Images
The Replika personal AI companion logo is displayed on a mobile phone screen.

“The research and reporting in that article has provided a powerful impetus for reform,” Blumenthal said. “The article was a galvanizing force and continues to be a factual part of our case for this kind of legislation.”

Chatbot continues on A7



H John Voorhees III/Hearst Connecticut Media
Michael Halas Jr., of Halas Farm Market, in Danbury, is the fourth generation to work the farm which is celebrating its 100th anniversary.

‘TRUE TO OUR ROOTS’
Fourth-generation family farm celebrates 100 years of harvest in Danbury

By Kaitlin Keane
STAFF WRITER

DANBURY — Walking down the rows of vegetables growing in the fields his grandfather planted, Michael Halas Jr. marveled at how his family has stayed “true to our roots” in the 100 years since Halas Farm opened in Danbury.

“We still farm (with) a lot of practices that have been passed down since my great-grandfather,” said Halas, who is the fourth-generation owner of the farm. “That’s what’s pretty special to me — the fact that we’ve been doing a lot of similar practices since 1925 and it’s still working for us.”

Halas continues on A7



ELECTION 2025

It’s Election Day

When polls open, where to vote and what’s on the ballot

By Brianna Gurciullo
STAFF WRITER

Election Day is here, giving voters a chance to weigh in on who should lead their local governments and school districts.

Here are answers to some common questions about Election Day.

Who are the candidates?

Tuesday is a municipal election, so depending on

your city or town, you could have candidates for mayor or first selectman, school board, Board of Finance, legislative bodies such as a City Council or Board of Aldermen, Planning and Zoning Commission, town clerk, treasurer, constables, sheriffs and more.

Some voters may also have a question or questions on their ballots about proposed changes to their town’s charter.

Election continues on A4

WASHINGTON

Residents want better coverage, oppose cell tower

By Kaitlin Keane
STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON — A proposal to build a cell tower in Washington’s village of New Preston has residents concerned about the potential safety, scenic and environmental impacts and seeking alternative solutions.

“We all want cell coverage for safety,” said Patricia Werner, who lives in

New Preston, one of five villages that make up Washington. “We don’t want it at 17 Warren Road.”

Over 140 residents have signed a petition opposing the proposed installation of a cell tower at 17 Warren Road and urging “the relevant authorities to reconsider this application and prioritize the well-being and preferences of our community.”

Cell continues on A4

Conn. SNAP benefits to be partially funded in Nov.

By Paul Hughes
STAFF WRITER

HARTFORD — A woman looking for groceries Monday morning at the nonprofit Hands on Hartford Manna Food Pantry, as the the nation’s biggest food aid program remained in a legal limbo, was told to come back Wednesday when the community cupboard would reopen.

She showed up minutes after Gov. Ned Lamont, U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal and Attorney General William Tong wrapped up a news conference inside discussing the ongoing

INSIDE

Trump administration says SNAP will be partially funded this month. **B7**

fallout of the government shutdown for people in Connecticut, including the 360,000 monthly recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program who had their food benefits suspended Saturday.

Tong said definitive word on the resumption of SNAP benefits was imminent because the the administration of President Donald Trump was under

a deadline by the close of business Monday to tell two federal judges whether it will partially or fully fund SNAP benefits, including a legal challenge that a coalition of 21 other attorneys general including Tong and three governors brought in Massachusetts.

At that time, Tong said the question was whether the Trump administration will use a \$5 billion contingency fund to provide reduced SNAP benefits for November or fully fund the program using both contingency funds and additional available funds.

SNAP continues on A4



Paul Hughes/Hearst Connecticut Media
Attorney General William Tong said he believes that President Donald Trump can fully fund SNAP benefits during a news conference Monday at the Hands on Hartford Manna Food Pantry before the Trump administration announced a plan to only partially fund SNAP benefits.

Keeping Taxes Down

Record Investments in Schools

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VOTE

for

Mayor Roberto Alves

By Tuesday, Nov. 4th

Paid for by Alves for Danbury, Frank R. Salvatore Jr. Treasurer. Approved by Roberto Alves.