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# JOURNAL & COURIER

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Young members of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela take part in a march in Caracas, Venezuela, on Nov. 13, 2025. PHOTOS BY LEONARDO FERNANDEZ VILORIA/REUTERS FILE

## Fractures loosen Socialist Party's grip on Venezuela

**Economic woes, halted bonuses weaken loyalty**

REUTERS

On the edge of Venezuela's main city Maracaibo, members of a local branch of the ruling socialist party went door to door in the weeks after U.S. forces captured President Nicolás Maduro, asking residents if they still supported the party that has run the country for nearly 20 years. The result: about half of members said they no longer did.

"The response is very bad," said a person who helped lead the effort. "There is division among us."

While Reuters was not able to independently verify the canvassing results, the reported drop in support aligned with information gathered from three other parts of the country.

The news agency spoke to 13 party members or local leaders across four

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The United Socialist Party of Venezuela was created in 2007 by merging the disparate political and social forces that swept socialist President Hugo Chavez to power in 1999.

## Purdue creates new level of helpful robots

Jane Imbody

AI-assisted reporter  
USA TODAY NETWORK

WEST LAFAYETTE — Purdue University researcher Sooyeon Jeong is working to make robots more helpful and personable.

Jeong, an assistant professor of computer science, leads a lab that focuses on human behavior and artificial intelligence.

Her research, which has already helped cancer patients, people with aphasia, hospitalized children and older adults, is now expanding to improve the way humans and robots communicate and collaborate, according to a community announcement.

**Robots can be study buddies**

One of her recent projects involves creating robot software to help students learn or complete tasks.

"For a lot of people, working in a study group helps provide peer accountability," Jeong said in the announcement. "But for some people, that can be difficult in terms of logistics or social anxiety. There are existing technologies like productivity apps that do things like block YouTube, but they're mostly prohibitory. They don't encourage or support you the way peers would. So we got interested in seeing if we could build a robot that would provide both companionship and support to help someone study and be productive."

Jeong and her team tested several iterations of the robot. In one, the robot was simply present, pretending to work on its own task while the student studied. In another, the robot would periodically remind the student of their goals. In the third scenario, the robot offered emotional support, similar to an exercise instructor in a challenging class.

"In that third one, the robot would offer emotional support, saying things like, 'You're doing a great job! We can do this together!'" Jeong said. "It would encourage the student to take short breaks, stretch, move around and then refocus."

The study found that the most effective strategy depended on the student's personality, mood and the subject they

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## School board member known for 'gay agenda' comments resigns

Jillian Ellison

Lafayette Journal & Courier  
USA TODAY NETWORK

LAFAYETTE — The Lafayette School Corp. announced the resignation of board member Chuck Hockema on Monday evening.

Hockema, who was elected to the LSC school board in 2022, resigned on Jan. 30 because of personal health issues, ac-

ording to a news release.

During his 2022 election, Hockema campaigned for the school board seat on the promise to "preserve traditional values and beliefs." Notably, in interviews he highlighted that he didn't want teachers to promote the "gay agenda" and "woke ideology" in classrooms.

"If there's a teacher that wants to be gay, that's OK," Hockema told the J&C in a 2022 interview. "That's their prerogative.

I've hired gay people. I've had them work for me, but I would not allow a gay person to push his feelings and his ideology off on other employees. If they did that, they'd be gone."

After backlash from community members, Hockema said his personal beliefs had been misrepresented. During a board meeting in 2023 shortly after his election, Hockema said those who disagreed with his beliefs would "have to live with it."

"They're in opposition to me," Hockema said, "and they won't allow me to have my background, my interest and my feelings. I can't expose that without them being upset, but I'm not going to quit."

In the release, LSC said it will search for a replacement to finish Hockema's term, which will end on Dec. 31.

Jillian Ellison is a reporter for the Journal & Courier. She can be reached via email at [jellison@usatodayco.com](mailto:jellison@usatodayco.com).

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