SEVERNA PARK GRAD GOING TO WORLD SERIES COACHING BLUE JAYS SPORTS

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TRUMP WATCH

Wildlife refuge set for drilling

The Trump administration on Thursday finalized a plan to open the coastal plain of Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas drilling, renewing long-simmering debate over whether to drill in one of the nation's most sensitive wilderness areas.

The plan fulfills a promise by President Donald Trump and congressional Republicans to open this portion of the refuge to possible development. The massive GOP bill of tax breaks and spending cuts, passed during the summer, called for at least four lease sales within the refuge over a 10-year period.

After being sworn into office in January, Trump signed an expansive executive order aimed at boosting oil and gas drilling, mining and logging in Alaska, which was cheered by the state's political leaders who saw new fossil fuel development as critical to Alaska's economic future and criticized by environmental groups that see the proposals as worrying in the face of a warming climate.

Here are more Trump administration headlines from Thursday:

Pardon: Trump has pardoned Binance founder Changpeng Zhao, who created the world's largest cryptocurrency exchange and served prison time after failing to stop criminals from using the platform to move money connected to child sex abuse, drug trafficking and terrorism.

Settlements: Trump is reportedly seeking $230 million from the Department of Justice as compensation for past investigations, a sum that would add to the president's list of settlements. Trump has already settled with media companies, including CBS and ABC, and the administration has also settled with colleges, universities and businesses.

Cartels: The U.S. military on Wednesday launched its ninth strike against an alleged drug-carrying vessel, killing three people in the eastern Pacific Ocean, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said, expanding the Trump administration's campaign against drug trafficking in South America. **See Page 8**

San Francisco: Trump said Thursday that he's backing off a planned surge of federal agents into San Francisco to quell crime after speaking to the mayor and several prominent business leaders who said they're working hard to clean up the city. It was not clear if the president was canceling a National Guard deployment or calling off immigration enforcement by CBP agents.

Sanctions: The European Union on Thursday heaped more economic sanctions on Russia, adding to Trump's new punitive measures the previous day against the Russian oil industry. Russian President Vladimir Putin called Washington's move an "unfriendly act" that could backfire by spiking global oil prices. Speaking to reporters in Moscow, Putin acknowledged that the "serious" U.S. sanctions will have "certain consequences" for Russia, but maintained that they will not significantly impact its economy. **See Page 9**

— From wire and Sinclair National Desk reports

Demolition continued Thursday on a portion of the East Wing of the White House in preparation for the construction of a new ballroom. Montgomery County company Aceco's logo is visible on the equipment, leading to backlash from those who oppose the project. JACQUELYN MARTIN/AP

Demolition work dings Md. firm

People have left messages, posted one-star reviews since start of White House project

By Jeff Barker

Aceco, a Montgomery County demolition company, finds itself in a public relations nightmare sparked by people offended at its role in tearing down the White House East Wing to make way for President Donald Trump's planned ballroom.

So many people posted unflattering messages about the firm — giving it one-star reviews — that Yelp temporarily disabled further comments. Posts included: "Traitors to the United States," "How dare you destroy part of OUR house," and "Oops. Bad move tearing down the People's House."

Demo companies aren't accustomed to coping with the social media fallout that comes from becoming an unwitting player in the nation's politics and culture wars. So what does Aceco do now?

Turn to Demolition, Page 2

Economy, federal cuts stirring fears

County residents in poll say issues are top concerns

By James Matheson

Economic impacts of President Donald Trump's restructuring of the federal government are among the most pressing concerns for Anne Arundel County residents, according to a survey from Anne Arundel County Community College.

The Center for the Study of Local Issues, an applied research unit at the college, conducts a semiannual survey of county residents. The survey's second installment of 2025 found that the overall economy and economic concerns related to the federal government were cited by 42% of respondents. Twenty-seven percent cited an issue related to the federal government as being most concerning.

"We're still looking at a lot of economic anxiety," Dan Nataf, the center's director, told the Capital Gazette. "Some of it is because of the immediate impact of federal government restructuring; about half of (the concern) is because of that. And that adds a layer to general economic anxiety about the future and what that means for unemployment."

The center conducted the survey of 1,482 Anne Arundel County residents from Oct. 3-11.

The survey first asked respondents to identify the top two "most important problems facing Anne Arundel County at the present time." Among the top three related concerns, 26% listed overall concerns about the economy, 20% listed taxes and 16% cited "Economy — Loss of jobs or income due to changes in the federal government."

Fears associated with the federal government have been a common trend in Anne Arundel under the Trump administration. Cuts to the federal government and their resulting fallout were among the biggest issues county residents cited in the spring 2025 survey.

Before the Trump administration took office in January, the county was home to more than 25,000 federal civilian workers, and had 15,000 federal civilian jobs located within its borders. The Maryland Department of Labor does not have an updated estimate for the number of federal civilian workers who live in Anne Arundel County.

"The employment side is really the driver right now in terms of economic anxiety," Nataf said. "The number of people who are laid off impacts their ability to consume, and there are all sorts of other fallouts on the local economy. If you take away the people who are immediately impacted by

Turn to Survey, Page 2

Businesses, building owners bemoan new energy standards

Say rules inflicting financial stress

By Josh Davis and Brian Carlton

Some Maryland building owners and business groups say the state's new energy standards are an expensive overreach, putting financial stress on companies and consumers alike.

Covered buildings were supposed to submit data about their energy consumption by Oct. 1, the first of what will be annual reports on their progress toward reaching the goals within the 2022 Building Energy Performance Standards (BEPS). That law requires a 20% reduction in the average direct greenhouse emissions of all commercial and multi-family buildings that are 35,000 square feet or larger by the year 2030. By 2035 the reduction must be 60% and then 100% by 2040.

The goal is to phase out older energy-generation methods like coal, natural gas, propane and heating oil, but businesspeople argue this is the wrong time to start.

"The economy's shrinking and vacancies might well go up. To mandate commercial building owners to spend additional money at

Turn to Greenhouse, Page 9

Del. Wayne Hartman, a Republican representing Wicomico and Worcester counties, is among those questioning the feasibility of Maryland's green building requirements. FILE/SUN STAFF

Father pleads guilty in toddler's overdose

Faced neglect charges after death

By Maggie Trovato

A Curtis Bay father on Thursday pleaded guilty to child neglect in the death of his 23-month-old son.

As part of a plea agreement, Nathan Houck, 32, will go on house arrest pending his sentencing. A sentencing hearing is set for Dec. 4. He had not previously been in custody.

In March, Nathan and Brooke Houck were charged in the 2024 death of their son, Landon. The Maryland Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Baltimore ruled that the child died from a fentanyl overdose.

Nathan Houck was charged with child neglect and reckless endangerment.

Brooke Houck, 28, was charged with involuntary manslaughter, child neglect, child abuse and reckless endangerment. According to charging documents, investigators believe she brought fentanyl into their home.

Brooke Houck has a trial scheduled for Dec. 9. Brooke Hofhenke, her attorney, did not immediately respond Thursday to a request for comment.

Efforts by the Capital Gazette to reach Brooke Houck were unsuccessful.

During Nathan Houck's plea hearing Thursday, Anne Arundel County Assistant State's Attorney Shane Nolan said that on July 21, 2024, officers from the Anne Arundel County

Turn to Fentanyl, Page 2

Maryland families struggle as health insurance costs surge

By Todd Karpovich

Family health insurance for most American workers averaged $27,000 this year, according to a recent survey by the health research group KFF, and Maryland families are feeling the strain.

Rising premiums are hitting the state's middle class especially hard, experts said, as wage growth remains stagnant and local health care costs climb. National surveys show that workers are paying more out of pocket for coverage, and recent disruptions in the Baltimore-area insurance market are adding to the pressure.

"It really is the middle class who is most squeezed by surging health insurance costs," said Anirba Basu, chairman and CEO of Sage Policy Group, a Baltimore-based consultancy.

"The upper class can better withstand inflation triggered by health insurance, groceries, and electricity rates. Those with lower incomes may receive support in the form of Medicaid, SNAP, and housing vouchers. But the middle class is on its own, faced with an increasingly stagnant labor market and continually rising prices."

Gene M. Ransom III, CEO for MedChi, the Maryland State Medical Society, said patients in the state may soon face higher medical costs, not because of rising insurance rates, but because insurers are increasingly dropping doctors from their networks.

Ransom emphasized that Maryland's physicians are among the lowest-paid in the nation, even as hospital costs are tightly controlled under the state's rate-setting system. Doximity, an online network for health care professionals, lists the Baltimore metro area as the ninth lowest in the nation for 2025 when it comes to physician compensation.

Turn to Insurance, Page 9

Monopoly's Baltimore game to debut Friday

Mr. Monopoly will unveil Monopoly: Baltimore Edition at Power Plant Live! on Friday, highlighting the city's landmarks, culture and local businesses. **Page 3**

Maryland federal workers take $700 loans

Hundreds of Maryland federal workers impacted by the recent government shutdown are taking temporary state loans to help cover their living expenses. **Page 7**

Racanelli to retire from leading National Aquarium

After more than 14 years with the National Aquarium in Baltimore's Inner Harbor area, President and CEO John Racanelli announced that he will retire by the end of the year. **Page 7**

TALK TO US: The Capital Gazette welcomes reader submissions responding to our coverage or highlighting an issue. Letters should be 350 words or fewer and submitted online at capitalgazette.com/letters or sent to **capletts@capgaznews.com.** All submissions should include your name, address and phone number.

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