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NEWS, 5A

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Demonstrators rally during the Oct. 4 “Rise Up for Gaza” international day of action in Washington, DC. Democratic politicians have struggled to strike a balance between long-standing U.S. support for Israel and voter outrage over civilian suffering in Gaza and escalating settler violence in the West Bank. MEHMET ESER/MIDDLE EAST IMAGES/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

## Democrats face scrutiny over Israel-Gaza war

Some met with protests over votes, donations

Hannan Adely  
NorthJersey.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK

New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker recently visited New Hampshire, where he met with activists and spoke at a town hall meeting, sparking speculation about a potential 2028 presidential run.

The trip also underscored a political reality confronting Booker and other Democrats. The Gaza war continues to shape the political landscape, and candidates now face scrutiny over where they stand.

In New Hampshire and other early primary states, ads have already begun targeting candidates, including Booker, for their support for arms sales to Israel.

The issue, which former Vice President Kamala Harris faced during her failed presidential bid, continues to divide the party and provoke pointed questions for prominent Democrats. For Booker — known for his soaring rhetoric, charisma and sharp critiques of Trump administration policies — the central question is whether growing Democratic dissatisfaction with U.S. support for



During her book tour, former Vice President Kamala Harris faced repeated protests over Israel. “Look, we should’ve done more as an administration,” Harris said.

ALAN POIZNER/SPECIAL TO THE TENNESSEAN

Israel could hamstring a future campaign.

Democratic politicians are struggling to strike a balance between long-standing U.S. support for Israel and voter outrage over civilian suffering in Gaza and escalating settler violence in the West Bank. The tension is pushing some candidates to recalibrate their messaging amid rising pressure from their base.

The tension was apparent during Harris’ campaign.

Harris, in her memoir “107 Days,” released in September by Simon & Schuster, expressed regret for not breaking more decisively from President Joe Biden on Gaza. She wrote that Biden showed “inadequate” empathy for Pal-

estinians and acknowledged losing voters over the issue.

Gaza was not a tipping point in her election, but it did not help, said Ilan Goldenberg, who served as director of Jewish outreach and policy adviser for Harris’ 2024 presidential campaign.

“It’s a challenge she had, and I think it’s a challenge Democratic candidates will have in 2028,” Goldenberg said. “This issue has risen in terms of how much it resonates with voters and is in the conscience. Even if it doesn’t measure up to issues like the economy or health care, it still matters.”

“I think the position Democrats will have to embrace is not to walk away from Israel but to also demand accountability and the end of blank checks,” Goldenberg added. “That’s what Democrats will want to see and I think a lot of independent voters.”

Booker, who is up for reelection to the U.S. Senate next year, has not said whether he will run for president in 2028. He ran to be the Democratic nominee for president in 2020 but ended his bid before the primary election.

As he visited New Hampshire in November, an ad aired on television and social media zeroing in on his July meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The ad, from the Institute for Middle East Understanding,

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## Social Security checks on usual schedule

Mike Snider and Sarah Moore  
USA TODAY

Michigan beneficiaries will see a normal Social Security payment schedule for January 2026, with the first checks expected on Jan. 14. The 2026 cost-of-living increase will be applied.

Social Security benefits — paid mostly to recipients who are older or retired — are typically paid on Wednesdays. On the second Wednesday of the month, payments are issued for beneficiaries whose birthday falls between the first and 10th days of the month (this month, that lands on Jan. 14), according to the Social Security Administration’s calendar.

Those born between the 11th and 20th get paid on the third Wednesday (Jan. 21) of the month; those born after the 20th of the month are paid on the fourth Wednesday of the month (Jan. 28), according to the SSA calendar. Social Security recipients who began getting benefits before May 1997 are paid on Jan. 3.

Starting in January, Social Security payments will be slightly bigger, thanks to a 2.8% cost-of-living adjustment, or COLA, increase. Payments will rise by about \$56, on average, per month, the Social Security Administration said.

The Social Security Administration’s calendar of benefit payments for 2026 is available online so you can check the schedules for budgeting

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## Man eats pizza with yard skeletons

Natalie Davies  
Detroit Free Press  
USA TODAY NETWORK — MICHIGAN

When Evan Baker launched Skeleton Pizza Supply Co. in August 2025, he did not know he’d spend upcoming weekends searching for giant skeletons and eating pizza in random front yards.

Yet, the past 11 weekends, he has snapped selfies with unique yard decor and pizza slices, gaining online support and input around Michigan and the Midwest.

What turned out to be an interactive marketing strategy started when the 41-year-old Flint resident picked up a pizza on his way home from coaching a soccer

game in September. He noticed a giant skeleton in a front yard on the side of the road and took the opportunity to post about it on his business Facebook and Instagram pages.

“It’s the weekend. Go sit on a stranger’s lawn and eat a greasy slice

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