

Some people choosing to forgo gifts this holiday

Trend comes as survey finds 60% say gifting culture is “out of hand.” **In Money**

Nebraska volleyball enters tourney with confidence

Perfect under Dani Busboom Kelly, the women’s team is ready for an NCAA title run. **In Sports**

These 10 TV shows are the best of the year

Some are favorites such as “The Pitt”; others are lesser known gems such as “North of North” and “Taskmaster.” **In Life**

# USA TODAY

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FROM LEFT: NOAH WYLE PROVIDED BY HBO MAX; ANNA LAMBE PROVIDED BY NETFLIX; JASON MANTZOUKAS BY TOMMASO BODDI/GETTY IMAGES FOR NETFLIX

## Signs of peril flashing for GOP

Tennessee vote adds to evidence of a ‘blue wave’

Zac Anderson and Joey Garrison  
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – Alarm bells already were blaring for President Donald Trump and the Republicans.

Now, the outcome of a special election in Tennessee on Dec. 2 provides further evidence that Democratic voters are energized heading into the next crucial election cycle after seeing their leaders in 2024 get booted from power in Washington.

The Volunteer State race for an open U.S. House seat ended with the Democratic nominee, Aftyn Behn, losing by 9 percentage points in a district Trump carried last November by 22 points. That 13-point swing away from the GOP is one in a series of recent races in which Democrats overperformed against historic ballot results. It has their party leaders sounding increasingly optimistic about next year, while Republicans are the ones expressing concerns.



President Donald Trump and House Speaker Mike Johnson are fighting to preserve a slim GOP majority heading into 2026. CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES

“This is one of the biggest flashing red-light warning signs we’ve seen yet for Republicans,” Matt Whitlock, a former GOP Senate aide and adviser to the National Republican Senatorial Committee, wrote on social media as the Tennessee race wrapped up.

Though Trump was eager to tout the Republican candidate’s victory in Tennessee, the fact that such a deeply red district was even competitive could signal problems for his party. Trump near the end of the campaign inserted himself into the race – as well as millions of dollars from the national Republican machine – to avert an upset in a district that Tennessee Republicans had created in 2022 to be safely held in the GOP column.

Trump held multiple tele-town halls in the final days of the race, rallied his nearly 109 million followers on X to back Republican candidate Matt Van Epps and called directly into a rally on the eve of the election. Outside Republican political action committees spent heavily on attacks ads portraying Behn as a “radical” liberal.

Though these efforts appeared to work to galvanize a Republican base that wasn’t paying close attention to the race, it offered a warning sign for the 2026 midterm campaign.

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## For many, caregiving is ‘hardest job’ ever



Katy Freeman’s son, Ollie, was born prematurely. She had a lengthy hospital stay and worked while she was there. “I get five times the help for PTSD related to combat action 13 years ago then I do for my daily struggles with postpartum anxiety and caregiver burnout,” she said. PROVIDED BY KATY FREEMAN

### Readers share stories exploring the struggles, financial burdens and mental health impacts

Madeline Mitchell USA TODAY

Katy Freeman, 39, was a senior leader at a health care company when she unexpectedly delivered her son, Ollie, at only 26 weeks pregnant. The next four months included a lengthy hospital stay for Freeman, a trying neonatal intensive care unit journey for Ollie – and work. Freeman’s employer, she said, shipped her laptop to her in the hospital. ● These are the kinds of stories USA TODAY heard from caregivers around America. ● Readers responded to The Cost of Care survey, sharing how caregiving has changed them and their lives. USA TODAY launched the survey in May, asking readers about caregiving challenges and solutions they’d like to see in the care space. ● “I went back to work at eight weeks postpartum, even though I was still in the hospital six weeks postpartum due to complications,” Freeman, from Aurora, Colorado, wrote. “I had to work because losing my insurance wasn’t an option. Ollie was in the NICU for four months, and I visited him every day on my lunch break.” See CAREGIVERS, Page 3A

“I had to work because losing my insurance wasn’t an option.”  
Katy Freeman  
Aurora, Colorado

### Exploring solutions for caregivers

Experts weigh in on the feasibility of readers’ suggested fixes. 2A

## Few hiring undocumented workers charged



Federal agents block protesters at an Immigration and Customs Enforcement raid July 10 at a cannabis farm near Camarillo, California. MARIO TAMA/GETTY IMAGES

Christopher Cann  
USA TODAY

A Michigan couple was arrested recently and charged with employing and housing hundreds of undocumented immigrants for their profitable plumbing business.

The case, which entered the public eye after a five-year investigation, drew national headlines and was described in detail on the Internal Revenue Service’s website. One reason the story caught national attention: It’s a rare instance of an employer being held accountable for allegedly hiring undocumented workers.

Since returning to office, President Donald Trump has launched a mass deportation campaign, surging federal resources across the country in operations that have overwhelmingly targeted immigrants believed to be in the

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