Is paying off your mortgage early worth it?

Experts weigh pros and cons, saying it may be better to pay off other debts first. **In Money**

Minnesota turns again to Cousins in QB quandary

Armour: The Vikings risk squandering a great defense as it makes a new/old choice. **In Sports**



TOBY MELVILLE/ REUTERS

Johnny Depp's comeback tells a story

The actor, who stars in "Ebenezer," his first Hollywood film in eight years, seems to have orchestrated his return, experts say. **In Life**

USA TODAY

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Democratic Sens.-elect Annie Andrews of South Carolina, James Talarico of Texas, center, and Troy Jackson of Maine attend orientation Nov. 9. JIM WATSON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Incoming lawmakers explore new digs

Orientation likened to 'drinking from fire hose'

Aysha Bagchi, Arit John, Bart Jansen and Zachary Schermele
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – Sen.-elect Troy Jackson quickly learned just how much attention is lavished on new lawmakers when he arrived at the U.S. Capitol on Nov. 10.

The soon-to-be freshman Maine Democrat rode the electric train from the Russell Senate Office Building with a group of well-wishers and took pictures with them at the Capitol platform. Then there were more requests for pictures. Next, a family of tourists approached him to congratulate him on beating five-term GOP Sen. Susan Collins.

"The entire class are not just brilliant and really just passionate about the issues in their communities, but they're also really good people."

Sen.-elect Juliana Stratton, D-Illinois

"Awesome," Jackson said. "At this point, everything is going great, so I'm very excited."

A week after winning, more than 100 new lawmakers have traded the campaign trail for the halls of Congress.

They're attending panels, meeting new colleagues and learning the ins and outs of how to set up a congressional office. They're making new friends, figuring out where they'll live when they're in Washington and how they'll split their time between the capital and their districts.

And sometimes they're just figuring out where to go next – literally.

Democrat Cait Conley, an Army veteran who ousted Rep. Mike Lawler, R-New York, appeared to get lost while talking to a reporter in a House office building. After comparing her freshman orientation experience to the first week of school, her voice trailed off.

"Sorry, I'm actually trying to figure out how to get out of here," she said, before resolving to "follow the exit signs."

Making friends early on

More than 100 newly elected

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Thanksgiving meals may cost less

Turkey, cranberries among food items with reduced prices

Betty Lin-Fisher • USA TODAY

There's a bright spot for consumers among rising food prices at the grocery store: the average cost of a Thanksgiving meal is going down. • A Thanksgiving meal for 10 will cost $78.93 – or 0.4% less than a year ago – including dessert, according to an analysis by the Wells Fargo Agri-Food Institute. • However, some shoppers may not notice the Thanksgiving savings, said Michael Swanson, chief agricultural economist for Wells Fargo. • "It's hard to convince people because when they go in [to the store], they're certainly going to throw more things into their shopping cart than just the menu, and they're not going to hit that register with this price point," he said.

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GETTY IMAGES

Move to impeach Hegseth blocked

Challenges continue to loom for Pentagon chief

Miles J. Herszenhorn, Zachary Schermele and Michael Loria
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – The House dismissed an effort to impeach Pete Hegseth, handing the embattled Pentagon chief a significant victory even as he faces serious questions about his political future.



Hegseth

The House voted 211-204 to send the measure to the Judiciary Committee, likely killing it.



Massie

Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Kentucky, who introduced the articles of impeachment against Hegseth, was the sole Republican to vote in favor of proceeding with the effort. The narrow vote came down, in part, to absences: 11 Democrats and seven Republicans didn't vote.

The vote was a significant defeat for House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-New York, ahead of an upcoming leadership election next week, where he is hoping to cement his position as the incoming speaker of the House.

If all the absent Democrats, a group that included Rep. Nancy Pelosi, D-California, had shown up to vote, the impeachment effort would likely have survived. Several said afterward they were delayed because of unexpected traffic coming from a Washington event.

In a statement, the office of Rep. Melanie Stansbury, D-New Mexico, said she and other House members were "blocked from entering the Capitol to vote due to a traffic incident and a police escort of a bus during the vote."

"When she reached the chamber, the vote had just gavelled out," the statement said.

Massie, an anti-war Republican and frequent thorn in the side of the Trump administration, argued that Hegseth violated the Constitution by waging war against Iran without congressional approval, launching deadly strikes against suspected drug boats in the Caribbean Sea and ignoring laws to minimize civilian casualties.

Massie is set to exit Congress at the end of the year after losing his primary to Ed Gallrein, a candidate backed by

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James R. Hoffa's disappearance on July 30, 1975, from a Michigan restaurant parking lot has fueled decades of speculation about his fate. AL MUTO/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES FILE

Mysteries in history maintain their hold on our imagination

Phaedra Trethan
USA TODAY

They seemed to vanish into thin air. A famed aviator. A hijacker who exchanged cash for passengers' lives. A labor leader linked to the Mafia. Three men who escaped from a prison thought to be escape-proof. An entire settlement full of English colonists.

Where did they go? And why, decades and even centuries later, do these mysteries still vex and fascinate us?

Americans "like the question," said Derek Arnold, a professor at Villanova University who teaches a course on conspiracy theories. "The story is art. The science is realism, and a lot of people would rather have the story than the explanation."

Cases where people seem to vanish without a trace are as old as time, Arnold said. And we like to construct stories around those cases, even when we don't know all the facts.

"The theories are fun," he said. "Almost as alluring as what might actually have happened."

These "ultimate mysteries," he added, give us an opportunity to piece together our own narrative working from clues left for us.

"We take those clues and create what we think might have happened, even as we get more refined theories," such as the recent expedition to find Amelia Earhart's long-lost plane, Arnold said. "We want to figure out how to explain

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