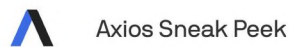




2 hours ago

Axios Sneak Peek

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Welcome back to Sneak. The president and Congress [marked a grim coronavirus milestone.](#)

Smart Brevity™ count: 1,383 words ... 5 minutes. Edited by Glen Johnson.

1 big thing: Trump allies plot to dethrone McConnell



Photo illustration: Shoshana Gordon/Axios. Photo: Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images

Mitch McConnell is facing a frontal assault from emboldened pro-Trump Republicans eager to unseat him as the Senate's GOP leader, Axios' Alayna Treene writes.

Why it matters: The Kentuckian has long been viewed as the most powerful Republican in Congress, a figure many in the party have feared turning into an enemy. His endurance has allowed him to reshape the Supreme Court and dictate much of the national political agenda for over a decade.

- Taking on McConnell risks not only triggering his wrath in the Capitol but making candidate-critics vulnerable to targeting by his ample supply of campaign cash.
- The challengers have been emboldened as Donald Trump has lambasted McConnell — giving them both political and financial cover.
- "What is wrong with this Broken Old Crow?" the former president said in [a statement tweeted by his spokesperson](#) on Sunday. "He's hurting the

Between the lines: Kelly Tshibaka, a primary challenger to Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), [said Monday](#) that “when I defeat Murkowski and become Alaska’s next U.S. senator, I will not support Mitch McConnell as leader.

- “It’s time for new, America First leadership in the Senate,” she said, echoing a Trump theme.
- Former Missouri Gov. Eric Greitens, running to fill Sen. Roy Blunt’s (R-Mo.) upcoming vacant seat, [made a similar pledge in September](#).

Tucker Carlson, one of the most influential conservatives in the country, [castigated McConnell](#) during his Fox News show last week — and promised to make the minority leader a consistent object of scorn in future segments.

- “In Washington, he’s known as the nastiest old woman in town,” Carlson said on his show last week during a segment about Bob Dole’s funeral.

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2. Scoop: Biden's Manchin battle



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Reporters trail Sen. Joe Manchin after the weekly Democrats caucus luncheon at the Capitol. Photo: Sarah Silbiger/Bloomberg via Getty Images

President Biden and Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) are locked in a disagreement over how long programs in the Build Back Better agenda should be funded, people familiar with the matter tell Axios' Hans Nichols.

Why it matters: The impasse all but guarantees the Senate will delay a vote on the \$1.75 trillion spending package until next year. It's also an indication Biden is willing to hold out for a bigger deal, as opposed to a faster one.

- The president told the senator during a phone call yesterday he didn't want to budge from his plan to fund some of his programs for one year, and others for 10 years.
- Manchin was equally clear: Before negotiating which individual programs should survive, he wants to agree to a common denominator for their funding term.
- Biden wants to focus on the numerator — the top-line cost of each program — regardless of how long it endures.

Shorter durations mean more programs can be started or funded under a given price tag.

their true cost.

- It also has the politically unpalatable effect of raising the overall price tag.
- Manchin's insistence on using the same time horizons shows just how far the two sides have to travel to achieve a deal.
- His office declined to comment on the specifics of his conversation with Biden.
- A White House official said: "The president and Sen. Manchin deal with each other in good faith, and their calls have been constructive and friendly."

[Keep reading.](#)

3. By the numbers: F's for congressional mapmakers

Grades for new 2022 congressional maps, by state

Grade based on partisan fairness, competitiveness (similarly competitive relative to other maps that could have been drawn) and geographic features; provided by Princeton Gerrymandering Project

State	Grade	Commission	Partisan bent
Colorado	A	yes	No advanta
GA	C	no	Republic

OR	F	no	Significa Democr advanta
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Significa

Data: Princeton Gerrymandering Project with RepresentUs; Chart: Baidi Wang/Axios

Partisan legislators across the country have been busy manipulating district lines to bolster their party's chances of controlling the House next year, according to analysis of maps by the Princeton Gerrymandering Project and RepresentUs reviewed by Axios' Stef Kight.

By the numbers: Nineteen states have now finished the redistricting process, and Georgia, New Mexico and Virginia are awaiting only a final signature on their plans. The Redistricting Report Card project has released grades for seven of these 22 maps. Five received an F.

- Six of the remaining 28 states do not have congressional redistricting, as they only have one House seat.

Between the lines: The early results from the project reveal less gerrymandered maps in states where independent commissions are in charge of the process —such as in Colorado and Arizona.

- But not all commissions are created equal.
- Virginia's first-time independent commission process failed, leaving next year's maps to the courts.

year — focusing instead on shoring up their seven incumbents.

- Illinois was a critical state for Democrats, and it passed maps that would allow the party to add one House seat while eliminating two of Republicans'.
- So far, some of Republicans' biggest gains came in Texas, where they are set to pick up two more seats.
- The GOP has also pushed through [aggressive maps](#) in Ohio and North Carolina. They would add up to four Republican members of Congress in those two states, while removing four Democrats.
- But there is a good chance the state Supreme Courts in Ohio and North Carolina will strike down their state plans, the Cook Political Report's Dave Wasserman told Axios.

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4. Scoop: Afghan aid groups meet with NatSec staff



[Skip to main content](#)

A queue outside a German transport plane following the fall of Kabul in mid-August. Photo: Xinhua via Getty Images

A coalition of organizations still working to evacuate people from Afghanistan met today with top U.S. national security officials to discuss next steps, Axios' Sophia Cai has learned.

Why it matters: Tens of thousands of Afghans are grappling with a deepening economic and humanitarian crisis following the U.S. military and diplomatic pullout on Aug. 31, with reports of targeted assassinations as the Taliban settle scores.

Driving the news: The AfghanEvac Coalition, which represents 120 organizations, met with senior advisers from the National Security Council.

- The groups are eager for additional resources and continued collaboration with the State Department, Department of Defense and NSC to help people get out of Afghanistan.

What we're watching: The umbrella group was angling for a response to [a letter](#) members [wrote to the administration](#), as well as House and Senate leaders.

- The members didn't receive any concrete commitments but were told their letter caused the Biden administration to "change tack, and has made an impact on their thinking," one attendee told Axios.

efforts to bring thousands of at-risk Afghans to safety.

- Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) [made the same request](#) to the president two weeks ago.

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5. Democrat says Biden wrong on Nord Stream 2



Photo: Greg Nash-Pool/Getty Images

Rep. Ruben Gallego of Arizona, a Democrat who led a congressional delegation to Ukraine this weekend, tells Axios' Zachary Basu that Biden is wrong to allow the Nord Stream 2 pipeline to move forward while Russia is threatening to invade Ukraine.

Why it matters: Gallego views Nord Stream 2 as "interlinked" with the security situation in Ukraine.

against an invasion.

- Gallego said Biden is "incorrect" in thinking he can balance the U.S.-Germany relationship with the security risks the pipeline poses to Ukraine and Eastern Europe.
- "Nord Stream 2 is going to be another weapon in the toolbox of Russia, and we need to stop it before it really gets going," Gallego said during a phone interview today.

The big picture: Gallego and other members of the delegation — Reps. Seth Moulton (D-Mass.), Salud Carbajal (D-Calif.), Mike Waltz (R-Fla.) and Joe Wilson (R-S.C.) — are calling on the president to move faster to send lethal military aid to Ukraine.

- Gallego said the people of Ukraine have "the will to fight, the capabilities and the skills" to fend off Russia, but the U.S. must provide them with Javelin and Stinger missiles, drones and other equipment.
- Maximum deterrence "means we have to kill some Russians," Gallego said on CNN Sunday, while he was still in Kyiv. "They only understand pure power. And we have to give the Ukrainian army and special forces the ability to do that."

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Photos: Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images

Lawmakers held a moment of silence for the more than 800,000 Americans who've died from COVID-19.



House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer led the effort.



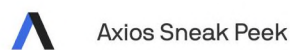
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House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy was in attendance, as well.



Capitol Police officers stood watch over the memorial service.



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