10/3/23 Tuesday

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Robo-Burrito: Food-Assembling Machine to Soon Enter Mexican Food Chain in US

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes more complex, experts anticipate a sharp increase in unemployment as machines begin to replace flesh-and-blood workers. Still, economic troubles seem to be arresting those developments.

Fast-casual food chain Chipotle unveiled on Tuesday a new robot that can do much of the work currently done by human employees to assemble customers' burritos, salads, and rice bowls. Dubbed a digital “makeline,” the machine debuted in a short promotional video showing it assembling a rice bowl alongside an employee who is making a burrito. The bowl is passed through the machine by several holders as the rice, beans, corn, and other toppings are dispensed from above. The completed bowl is then raised up to the countertop at the end of the assembly line, where the employee is finishing making a burrito, implying that the machine will take just as long as a human worker to finish the task.

The system is reportedly being developed in conjunction with Hyphen, a kitchen technology firm, and will be tested at the Chipotle Cultivate Center in Irvine, California, the firm's test kitchen. However, in the coming months, customers across Southern California can expect the robot to start assisting in assembling their orders, the company said.

This follows Chipotle's July debut of the Autocado, a machine dedicated to turning avocados into guacamole - a typically labor-intensive task that often requires a dedicated employee to perform over the course of a work shift.

Curt Garner, Chipotle's chief customer and technology officer, told US media that the goal of the automation wasn't to replace workers, but to help manage the increasing numbers of online orders that shops have been receiving. Online orders have to be made by the same workers who make the food of customers standing in the restaurant line, creating a choke point that slows down service.

"We’re operating like two restaurants out of one," Garner said, noting that unlike in-person customers who tend to chat with workers and tweak their orders as their being assembled, "digital kitchen customers wants to make sure an order is ready quickly and is accurate."

However, Garner also said that Chipotle's long-term vision was to make the automated makeline "be the centerpiece of all our restaurants' digital kitchens."

The threat posed to human workers by automation is palpable. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, reports by McKinsey and other analysts had warned that half of work activities are capable of being automated and that 47% of jobs were at risk of being automated with sufficient advances in artificial intelligence.

A study last year published in the journal Econometrica found that job automation can exact an even heavier toll on workers than before, impacting their livelihoods, job security, and quality of life. A study published by MIT last November also found that between 1980 and 2016,
automation “has reduced the wages of men without a high school degree by 8.8 percent and women without a high school degree by 2.3 percent, adjusted for inflation.”
That said, recent data compiled by the Association for Advancing Automation, an industry group, found that factories and other industrial users had ordered 37% fewer labor-saving robots in the second quarter of 2023 than a year ago, continuing a trend seen over the two previous quarters. The report credits instabilities in the US economy, such as high interest rates and slowing economic growth, with the slowing of automation.
"It's not that we've soured on automating," Jeff Burnstein, president of the industry group, told US media in late August. "But when people are worried about inflation and the economy, it puts a damper on everything - they hold off."

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Dow Jones Drops 430 Points as US Treasury Bonds Hit 16-Year High

As the yield on 10-year US Treasury notes on Tuesday hit levels not seen since 2007, stock traders launched massive selloffs, sending Wall Street indices into the negative. The Dow Jones plummeted by 430.97 points, a 1.29% drop, at closing bell as both the Nasdaq and S&P 500 indices suffered even worse losses. The initiating factor in the mass selloffs was the 10-year and 30-year Treasury bonds hitting their highest levels since August 2007, continuing a trend that began on Monday of rapidly increasing yields. Late on Tuesday morning, it was at 4.77% - even higher than at the opening bell.
On Friday, the Federal Reserve released new projections indicating that interest rates will be higher for longer than expected in order to ensure inflation slows to 2%. Higher interest rates are beneficial for investors. However, the fact that the Treasury depleted its cash reserves during the debt ceiling crisis earlier this year means it's now hungry for more, and has increased the number of bonds available to buy.
“Inflation continues to be too high, and I expect it will likely be appropriate for the Committee to raise rates further and hold them at a restrictive level for some time to return inflation to our 2% goal in a timely way,” Fed Governor Michelle Bowman said on Monday. Remarkably, the yield on the 2-year Treasury bond has remained above that of the 10-year bond, sitting at 5.12% on Tuesday morning. When the short-term bond’s yield is higher than the long-term bond, it’s called an inverted yield curve - a telltale sign that investors expect the economy to tank soon. Bizarrely, for nearly all of the 18-month period since the Fed started raising interest rates in the spring of 2022, the yield curve has been inverted.
However, if interest rates stay high for too long, it might smother business expansion alongside the inflation, triggering layoffs, a decline in business, and ultimately a recession. While inflation is lower than it was and job numbers have continued to increase, unemployment in the US has begun to tick higher and there are signs the economy may be beginning to slow. The recent downgrading of the US government’s credit rating in August, an effect of the crisis in confidence
caused by the debt ceiling showdown, which nearly caused a default, is also likely to hurt future international investment.

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US House Removes McCarthy From Speakership in Historic Vote

Over the weekend, Congress narrowly passed a continuing resolution funding the government for another 45 days, to give more time to debate a series of spending bills that form the 2024 budget.

After a vote of 216 to 210, the US House of Representatives on Tuesday removed US Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) as speaker of the House. It was the first time the lower chamber voted on vacating the speaker's office in 113 years and the first time it has ever succeeded.

The decision came after an earlier motion to table the vote failed, with 11 Republicans voting with Democrats against the motion and allowing it to proceed.

"It's to the benefit of this country that we have a better speaker than Kevin McCarthy," said US Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL), who called the vote against McCarthy. "The reason he went down today is because no one trusts him."

Gaetz said the California representative "is a feature of the swamp ... we are breaking the fever now and we should elect a speaker that is better."

Shortly after the motion cleared the congressional chamber, Republican held a closed-door meeting to discuss next steps, specifically who would be put forward to permanently fill the position. At present, it’s temporarily filled by US Rep. Patrick McHenry (R-NC).

McCarthy has since detailed that he will not be making another bid for the speakership.

"I will not run for speaker again, I'll have the conference pick somebody else," McCarthy said Tuesday evening. "I wouldn't change a thing."

The former speaker added the country is too great for the small visions of the eight Republicans who voted alongside Democrats to oust him from his post. Moreover, McCarthy said he will look into whether he will remain in Congress.

US President Joe Biden has weighed in on the latest developments and urged the House chamber to immediately elect a new speaker.

Democrats are expected to hold a meeting at 9 a.m. local time on Wednesday to address the McCarthy fallout.

Gaetz has suggested US Rep. Steve Scalise (R-LA) would make a better speaker than McCarthy.

The Florida lawmaker is a member of a small GOP faction that has used the party's slim House majority to push its own agenda on McCarthy. The faction, which is closely aligned with the Freedom Caucus and former US President Donald Trump, allowed McCarthy to become speaker in January only after extracting a series of agreements on policies, such as a willingness to engage in brinksmanship regarding budget cuts.
Even then, McCarthy only became speaker after 15 rounds of voting, with several members of the faction ultimately only agreeing to vote "present" during the vote instead of against the California lawmaker.

After McCarthy spent months refusing to raise the debt ceiling in an attempt to force Democrats into agreeing to steep budget cuts - a key demand of the Freedom Caucus - the speaker then agreed to cut a deal with Democrats in late May that provided for some limitations on the forthcoming budget, but well below what hard-liners had demanded. Gaetz and his coterie saw this as a betrayal and the threat to oust McCarthy has hung over the House chamber for months.

McCarthy's fate was ultimately sealed after he blinked a second time in the showdown with Democrats over the fiscal 2024 budget this past weekend. Without a budget, the federal government would have shut down many of its non-essential functions until new funding could be passed.

Republicans made clear they saw this as an acceptable outcome if it meant pressuring the Democrats into large budget cuts, but McCarthy again cut a deal with Democrats at the last minute to pass a 45-day funding extension, giving lawmakers more time to debate the budget without facing a shutdown.

In the debate that followed the tabling vote, Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH), who is a member of the Freedom Caucus, spoke in McCarthy's defense, saying the speaker had "kept his word" by passing its own version of the budget extension and not that advanced by the Senate, which is controlled by the Democrats.

"McCarthy has been rock solid," Jordan said.

After Jordan's speech, Gaetz rose to counter him, suggesting that getting rid of McCarthy would speed up the process of passing the key spending bills for the 2024 budget - a suggestion that elicited roars of laughter and mockery from much of the House GOP caucus. After he was accused of spreading "chaos" by calling for the vote, Gaetz said it was McCarthy who was the agent of chaos.

"Chaos is somebody who we cannot trust with their word," Gaetz said. "I think $33 trillion in debt is chaos. I think that facing a $2.2 trillion annual deficit is chaos. I think their not passing single-subject spending bills is chaos ... and the way to liberate ourselves from that is a series of reforms to this body."

Several Republicans who have long stood in opposition to McCarthy, such as Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-CO), wound up voting against Gaetz's attempt to vacate the speaker's seat.

"Nay, for now," Boebert replied during the voting, in which each representative voiced their vote when their name was called.

While some Republicans indicated they were looking to centrist Democrats to intervene and provide a path out of the situation, they showed little inclination to do so. According to US media reports, McCarthy was similarly disinterested in courting Democrats' help.

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Trump Slammed With Gag Order After 'Disparaging' Attacks Against Court Clerk

Trump is facing accusations in a New York civil trial that he defrauded investors by massively inflating the value of his properties and inflating his net worth. The New York Attorney General's Office is seeking to recover $250 million in addition to permanently barring Trump and company from engaging in any business deals in the Empire State. The judge presiding over Donald Trump's civil fraud trial in New York issued a limited gag order for the former president and other parties involved in the case, barring them from publicly speaking about his staff. The order came after Trump's Truth Social account posted about the judge's principal court while he sat feet from her in court. Judge Arthur Engoron did not mention Trump by name while issuing the order, saying instead that "one of the defendants" posted a "disparaging, untrue and personally identifying post" about his staff. The judge ordered the post deleted, but by that time it had already been shared across the internet.

"Personal attacks on members of my court staff are not appropriate and I will not tolerate it under any circumstances," Engoron said, adding that he warned counsel about the issue previously. During the trial, Trump's Truth Social account posted a picture of the clerk, Allison Greenfield, with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY).

"Schumer's girlfriend, Alison [sic] R. Greenfield, is running this case against me. How disgraceful! This case should be dismissed immediately!!" the now-deleted post read, which also shared a link to one of Greenfield's social media accounts.

The photo showed Schumer and Greenfield smiling while standing next to each other. Schumer's arm can be seen high on Greenfield's shoulder and the two do not seem to be in any kind of embrace. The image has been likened to photos people take with celebrities or politicians.

Screenshots of the post include a comment by Greenfield saying it was taken at a brunch event for the Chelsea Reform Democratic Club Founders. Greenfield also took a photo with US Rep.Carolyn Maloney (D-NC) at that event.

There have been no credible accusations that Greenfield and Schumer have an inappropriate relationship or any relationship at all. Schumer has been married since 1980. Trump was apparently sharing an accusation made by a conservative account on X (formerly Twitter) that started posting about Greenfield shortly before the trial began. The same account previously accused Engoron of drinking on the job.

It is not clear if the account, which has less than 500 followers, is satirical in nature. It purports to be "applying the 69th Amendment to the internet."

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Investigation Finds 'Predictive Policing' is Wildly Inaccurate

Using Artificial Intelligence to predict crime has grown in popularity with law enforcement agencies around the world, but there is little evidence that the technology is effective in reducing crime or costs. An investigation has shown that so-called predictive policing software produced almost no positive results, adding to a previous study that showed such software disproportionately focused on low-income and minority neighborhoods.

Predictive policing software has been growing in popularity with police forces around the nation. The companies that sell their services to police departments claim they use large data sets to emotionlessly and without bias predict where crimes are most likely to occur. But the investigation, performed by two tech-focused media outlets, revealed that at least in one locale, the software provided hardly any accurate predictions. The investigation looked at 23,631 predictions made by software from a company called Geolitica (previously PredPol) in the city of Plainfield, New Jersey.

It showed that over 10 months, Geolitica software correctly predicted where crime would occur less than one-half of 1% of the time.

David Guarino, a captain for the Plainfield Police Department said the city rarely used the program and has since abandoned it.

"Why did we get PredPol? I guess we wanted to be more effective when it came to reducing crime. And having a prediction where we should be would help us to do that," Guarino said. "I don't believe we really used it that often, if at all. That's why we ended up getting rid of it."

It has been reported that parts of Geolitica are being purchased by SoundThinking, which provides technology services, including predictive policing, to law enforcement.

Despite their inefficiencies, there is no guarantee their growth in popularity will be stemmed. In 1987, the first speed camera was installed in the United States. Today, there are more than 5,000 speed cameras installed across 18 US states and the District of Columbia, despite a myriad of controversies about their accuracy.

The city of Chicago reportedly gave out $2.4 million in erroneous fines issued by speed cameras between 2013 and 2015.

A report in 2014 revealed that Washington, DC, speed camera reviewers would make arbitrary decisions about which car to fine when more than one was in the picture.

In Baltimore, Maryland, an internal audit in 2013 revealed that cameras, promoted as having less than a 2% inaccuracy rate, actually had error rates exceeding 10%. One camera was found to be inaccurate 58% of the time. The audit was hidden from the public for nearly a year before complaints from residents that their cars were being ticketed while parked sparked a media investigation.

Despite this, speed cameras are still in use in the aforementioned cities and have continued to increase nationwide. This, critics suggest, is because the programs are big money-makers for cities and law enforcement.

Predictive policing does not have as direct of a link to police department revenue as speed cameras, but its promotional materials claim it can save departments money and a study by the RAND Corporation stated that the software is generally perceived as beneficial by officers,
despite that study also showing no statistically significant reduction in crime in areas it was used.

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US Police Chief Abruptly Resigns Weeks After Raid of Kansas Newspaper

The raid was condemned by First Amendment advocates including The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press and Reporters Without Borders, among multiple other organizations. The police chief of a small town in Marion County, Kansas, abruptly resigned on Monday after his raid on the Marion County Record's offices and other locations garnered nationwide attention and condemnation.

Dave Mayfield, who serves as the county's mayor, announced Marion Police Chief Gideon Cody's resignation during a city council meeting. Cody was suspended from his position on Thursday, more than six weeks after the raid and following proclamations from Mayfield that Cody would not be punished until after the Kansas Bureau of Investigations (KBI) finished its investigation into the incident.

There has been no word of the KBI finishing its investigation and Mayfield declined to comment on why Cody was suspended before his resignation.

The August raid included the newspaper's office, the owner's home, a reporter's home and the home of the vice-mayor. All of the raids happened simultaneously and utilized nearly the entirety of the force's on-duty officers.

The torrid affair began after a small local paper began investigating a local restaurant owner, Kari Newell. The paper had received information that Newell had been driving without a license for over a decade following a DUI conviction.

Newell's restaurant was applying for a liquor license, but Kansas state law prohibits individuals without driving licenses from obtaining a liquor license.

The newspaper decided against publishing the story, partially because of concerns about the motivations of the source of information, but passed it on to the vice-mayor and Cody for further review.

Simultaneously, a reporter for the paper was investigating Cody's past as a police captain in Kansas City. Cody abruptly resigned from that position a year before he would have received his pension and took the police chief job in Marion, despite a $50,000 reduction in pay. The paper had heard from multiple sources that Cody was facing demotion before his resignation due to sexual misconduct allegations.

The paper also decided not to publish a report on that because no sources would go on the record and the Kansas City Police Department declined to provide documentation, though they did ask Cody about the allegations.

A short time later, the Marion Police Department conducted its raids, alleging the newspaper accessed the information it had on Newell illegally. The paper claimed it obtained the information through public information and the city eventually confirmed the information was publicly available online.
Five days after the raid, the county's attorney Joel Ensey withdrew the search warrant used in the raid, saying it was "legally insufficient." A leaked email would later show Ensey was contacted by Cody about his plans to raid the paper, and which included his justifications for the raid according to local reports.

Mayfield appointed patrol officer Zach Hudlin as acting chief with the approval of the city council. In bodycam footage of the raid, Hudlin can be seen searching a reporter's desk, where he finds a folder marked with Cody's name. It's said the file contained details about the outlet's investigation into him, including the identity of sources. Hudlin can be heard informing Cody about the file in the bodycam footage.

Cody eventually admitted he was facing demotion before retiring from his job in Kansas City, according to local reports. Bodycam footage also revealed him telling Newell after the raid that he had evidence to share with her but didn't want to put it in a text message. Another portion of the video reportedly reveals him telling a deputy that he was having trouble turning off his bodycam but wanted to tell him a story once he turned it off.

The paper's owner, Eric Meyer, told national media after Cody's suspension on Thursday that although he was happy about the result, he finds the timing suspicious.

"It's long overdue. You know, we had to wait more than six weeks to get him suspended," said Meyer. "It kind of leads you to believe that there's some smoking gun somewhere that everybody knows about and we're going to try to get ahead of it."

Meyer also expressed concerns about Hudlin's appointment, saying his actions during the search exceeded the scope of the warrant.

Meyer’s mother, Joan Meyer, was the co-owner of the paper and lived with Eric when his house was raided. The elder Meyer, who was 98 at the time, died a day after officers raided her home from sudden cardiac arrest.

A coroner's investigation cited the stress of the raid as a contributing factor. An attorney for the paper told media outlets that they were considering a lawsuit.

Meyer was captured on bodycam footage telling officers that if she experiences a heart attack and dies, it would be their fault. "If I die, you're going to be sued for murder," she said.

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Forever Furloughed - Cartoon

Former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) was ousted from his position on Tuesday after US Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL) filed a motion to vacate the speakership.

There was some hope Democrats would come to McCarthy's aid and prevent Gaetz and his allies in the Republican party from removing him; however, the entire Democratic caucus voted along with eight Republicans to remove McCarthy as the leader of the lower chamber.

The vote came after Congress narrowly passed a continuing resolution to keep the government funded until mid-November. One of the largest sticking points was additional funding for the Zelensky regime in Ukraine, a provision that ultimately did not make it into the bill.
Gaetz accused McCarthy of making a “secret side deal” with Democrats on Ukraine in exchange for helping him pass the funding bill. That accusation was seemingly backed by Democrats when US President Joe Biden publicly called on McCarthy and other House Republicans to “keep their word” by authorizing more Ukraine funding.

To date, the US has given $111 billion in funding to Ukraine since the start of Russia’s special military operation, but support for continued aid has steadily dropped in the US and Europe - the primary benefactors of Kiev.

A recent poll found 55% of Americans oppose further aid in Ukraine. Meanwhile, Poland said it would halt funding and a political party that promised to end the funding recently won parliamentary elections in Slovakia.

Nearly half of House Republicans have come out against further aid to Ukraine without concessions from the Democrats on other issues.

The near government shutdown followed a debt default that was narrowly avoided during the summer. With another possible shutdown less than two months away, working for the US government - once seen as a stable alternative to the private sector - has critics acknowledging it's looking less dependable every day.

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Almost Half of Americans Say US Military Aid for Ukraine Not Worth Expense - Poll

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - Forty-five percent of Americans believe that military aid the United States has provided to Ukraine has not been worth the cost, according to a poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs published on Wednesday.

“As a whole, a slim majority of the American public (53%) say the $43 billion in military aid to Ukraine has been worth the cost while 45 percent say it has not been,” the pollster said.

Over two-thirds of Democrats (69%) think that US support for Kiev has been worth the cost, while 61% of Republicans feel the opposite. The independents are divided on the issue (51% worth it, 47% not).

When asked about F-16 fighters for Ukraine, 55% of Americans support the decision to provide them to Ukraine. However, the same share of Republicans oppose it.

"Majorities across the board oppose sending cluster munitions, perhaps because the question wording revealed that several NATO allies have banned them (61%)," the pollster said.

The survey also showed that 49% of Americans believe their country should urge Ukraine to engage in peace talks to stop the conflict as soon as possible.

At the same time, 47% believe the US should support Ukraine for as long as it takes, according to the poll.

The survey was conducted from September 7-18 by Ipsos Public Affairs among 3,242 adults in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia.

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More than 60% of Americans Say Third Major Political Party Needed – Poll

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) – Sixty-three percent of Americans believe "a third major party is needed" because the Democratic and Republican parties are doing "such a poor job" representing them, according to a Gallup poll released Wednesday. This marks a record high since Gallup began tracking the question in 2003 and a seven-percentage-point increase from 2022, although it is similar to the 62% measured in 2021. The increase came mostly from Republicans, 58% of whom wanted a third option, up from 45% last year. Still, independents are usually most likely to want a third party, with 75% responding as such this year.

The latest poll was conducted from September 1-23.

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IMF Says Inflation Rates Unlikely to Sink Back to Targets Until 2026

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - The global economy will face elevated inflation rates until 2026, when they may go back to targets established by each nation's central banks, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on a new report. "Given the current contractionary stance and anticipated policy action going forward, rates will be fully back at targets only by 2026, on average," the IMF said in its World Economic Outlook (WEO).

While the rates reached their multidecade highs in 2022, they will begin to slow down next year, the report added. "As policy tightening gradually rebalances aggregate demand toward potential output, supply chain disruptions have eased, and commodity prices have declined, headline inflation is coming down, but underlying price pressures (as captured by core inflation) remain elevated," the report said.

The IMF warned that near-term inflation expectations "have risen markedly" worldwide since 2022 despite long-term forecasts remaining anchored. The fund also noted that near-term expectations rose markedly after 2021. Speaking of the long-term, the IMF pointed out that inflation forecasts in developed countries have moved closer to targets since the pandemic.

"For emerging market economies, the distribution of near-term inflation expectations is somewhat wider and skewed to the upside, indicating greater variation in inflation experiences, particularly in recent quarters," the report added. The IMF pointed out that current paths for actual inflation are in line with historical medians. Headline and near-term inflation expectations are slowly declining after a year of persistent growth, it added.
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Blinken Warns of Opening 'Pandora's Box' if US Fails to Provide Aid to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - Secretary of State Antony Blinken said US failure to defend Ukraine against Russia will open the floodgates for more conflict across the globe. The Biden administration is facing resistance from members of Congress to providing Ukraine with more funding. No funds for Ukraine were included in a stopgap bill passed on Saturday to prevent a federal government shutdown amid growing Republican opposition to more Ukraine aid.

"If we don't defend them [Ukraine], we're going to be opening a Pandora's box, and we're gonna get a world of hurt," Blinken said during a conversation at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy on Tuesday.

Efforts to assist Ukraine, he added, involve forming an international coalition, which spans not only Europe but other regions, providing a blend of military, economic, and humanitarian support.

According to the Department of State, the US, since 2014, has channeled security assistance exceeding $46.7 billion to Ukraine, aiding its military with training and equipment to defend Ukrainian territory, strengthen its border security, and improve its collaborative efforts with NATO.

Overall, the US has spent more than $100 billion on the conflict in Ukraine, the White House's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) confirmed last month in documents sent to Congress posted by Fox News.

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McCarthy After Ousting Says 'I Will Not Run For Speaker Again, Wouldn't Change A Thing'

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - Congressman Kevin McCarthy after being the first Speaker to be ousted in the House of Representatives announced he will not run for the position again, but he wouldn't change a thing.

"I will not run for speaker again, I'll have the conference pick somebody else," McCarthy said Tuesday evening. "I wouldn't change a thing."

McCarthy added that the country is too great for small visions of those eight Republicans who voted with Democrats who voted to oust him from Speaker of the House. Moreover, McCarthy said he will look into whether he will remain in Congress.

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US Awards $967Mln for Nuclear Submarine Design, Development - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - General Dynamics Electric Boat has received an almost $1 billion US Navy contract extension to do more support, design and development work on Virginia class nuclear submarines, the Department of Defense announced in a press release. "General Dynamics Electric Boat Corporation [of] Groton, Connecticut, was awarded a $967,185,528 ...contract for lead yard support and development studies and design efforts related to Virginia Class submarines," the release announced on Tuesday. Most of the work on the project will be performed in Groton in the US state of Connecticut over the next year and is expected to be completed by October 2024, the Defense Department said. The Naval Sea Systems Command in Washington, DC will serve as the contracting activity and oversee work on the project, the Defense Department said.

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Additional 330 Workers Ford Laid Off Amid UAW Union Strike Brings Total to 930 - Spokesman

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - The Ford Motor Company has laid off an additional 330 workers at the Chicago stamping plant and the Lima engine plant amid the ongoing United Auto Workers (UAW) union strike, bringing the total number of laid off workers to 930, Ford spokesperson Dan Barbossa told Sputnik. "Approximately 330 employees have been asked not to report to work, with layoffs taking effect beginning September 30 at Chicago Stamping Plant and October 2 at the Lima engine plant," Barbossa said on Tuesday. "These 330 layoffs are in addition to 600 laid off from the Michigan assembly plant beginning September 15, bringing Ford’s total to 930 employees impacted by strike-related layoffs."

Barbossa said that UAW’s strike strategy to target specific facilities unintentionally obstructs operations at additional plants, attributing this to Ford’s intricately woven production frameworks. Thus, the strike has initiated a cascade effect through other, non-directly targeted location, he said. "These are not lockouts. These layoffs are a consequence of the strike at Chicago assembly plant, because these two facilities must reduce production of parts that would normally be shipped to Chicago Assembly Plant," Barbossa added. Some 19,000 US auto workers at various Ford, General Motors, and Stellantis facilities are striking due to unsuccessful negotiations, with the UAW seeking a 46% pay raise and a 32-hour work week, among other terms.

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McCarthy Will Not Run for House Speaker Again - Congressman

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - Congressman Kevin McCarthy will not run again for Speaker of the House of Representatives after he was ousted by a majority of his colleagues, Congressman Tim Burchett told reporters on Capitol Hill.

Earlier in the day, the House passed a motion to vacate McCarthy as Speaker, leaving the lower chamber leaderless amid attempts to pass full government funding legislation before short-term spending measures expire.

"[McCarthy] He graciously decided not to run again, I think that's a wise decision," Burchett said on Tuesday.

Burchett told reporters the House will be recessed until next Tuesday. Until then, all House business is at a stop.

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US Senate Foreign Relations Chief Says Will Continue Hold on Military Financing for Egypt

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Ben Cardin said that he will continue to block US military assistance to Egypt until Cairo makes progress on specific human rights issues.

The United States is withholding some $85 million in military assistance to Egypt. The United States, since 2012, has provided Egypt some $1.3 billion each year through foreign military financing.

"I intend to exercise fully the Committee's oversight responsibilities and my authorities to hold foreign military funds and the sale of arms to the government of Egypt, if it does not take concrete, meaningful, and sustainable steps to improve the human rights conditions in the country," Cardin said in a press release on Tuesday. "My hold on current funds will remain until specific human rights progress is made."

Cardin said Egypt's stability is in the US national interest and that interest is best served when the Egyptian government improves its human rights record.

Egypt must reform and improve significantly its pre-trial detention practices, accelerate the pardon and release of political prisoners as well as provide space for human rights defenders, civil society advocates, political opposition and independent media in Egypt, Cardin added.

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Biden Hopes House 'Quickly' Elects New Speaker to Replace McCarthy - White House
WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden hopes the US House of Representatives will immediately elect a new speaker to replace Congressman Kevin McCarthy especially because lawmakers need to pass full spending budgets for next year, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said in a press release.

"President Biden has demonstrated that he is always eager to work with both parties in Congress in good faith on behalf of the American people," Jean-Pierre said in the release on Tuesday. "Because the urgent challenges facing our nation will not wait, he hopes the House will quickly elect a Speaker."

Once the House of Representatives elect's a new speaker, Biden looks forward to working together with the lower chamber and with the Senate to address the US public's priorities, Jean-Pierre said.

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Oil Prices Rise First Time in 4 Days, OPEC+ Meeting Awaited

NEW YORK, October 4 (Sputnik) - Oil prices rose for the first time in four days after a senior Federal Reserve policy maker said the central bank was in no rush to pile rate hikes on Americans to get inflation back under control, suggesting that an anticipated increase before the year-end might not happen.

Raphael Bostic, who's president of the Atlanta Fed, one of the 12 regional central banks that make up the fuller Fed, said there might even be a rate cut by the end of 2024.

Aside from Bostic's messaging on rates, crude prices were also supported by news of a further delay in efforts to restart Iraqi oil exports via a Turkish pipeline and expectations that OPEC+ at its meeting on Wednesday would say something supportive.

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, crude for delivery in November settled at $89.23 per barrel on Tuesday, up 41 cents, or 0.5%. The US crude benchmark hit a three-week low of $87.77 earlier, after losing more than 5% over three prior sessions.

London-traded Brent for the most-active December contract settled at $90.92, up 21 cents, or 0.2%. The global crude benchmark plunged to a three-week low of $89.56 earlier, after losing more than 6% in three previous days of trading.

Bostic’s words were more than solace for investors betting on higher prices for commodities and equities. These investors have been desperate for a break from the fear factor of a super hawkish Fed that has gripped the investing world again after a respite in the second quarter.

US inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, hit 40-year highs of more than 9% in June 2022 before falling to as low as 3.0% by June this year. From there, it has started creeping again, reaching 3.7% in August, as high global oil prices bumped up fuel costs at home. In contrast, the Fed’s target for inflation is just 2% per annum.

Last year’s runaway inflation was inherited from epic federal relief spending and loose monetary policy put in place after the 2020 coronavirus outbreak. In response to that, the Fed hiked rates 11 times between March 2022 and July 2023, adding 5.25 percentage points to a prior base rate of just 0.25%.
In recent weeks, markets have been anticipating another rate hike in either November or December.

Bostic's comments also offset an utterly bearish mood that gripped markets earlier on Tuesday after the Labor Department reported that the number of job openings in the United States rose more than expected in August, chipping away at some of the confidence the Fed may have had in its fight against inflation.

An estimated 9.61 million jobs opened up in August, according to the Labor Department's latest monthly Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, or JOLTS, report. In July, there were just 8.92 million openings. Wall Street economists' consensus for August job openings were just around 8.8 million.

The JOLTS report came ahead of the more important September non-farm payrolls report scheduled for release on Friday. The Fed will be watching that closely to help steer its decision on rates. The central bank has repeatedly said that jobs and wage growth have to cool in order to moderate inflation.

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US Congressman Gaetz Says Not Interested in House Speaker Bid, Would Back Scalise, Emmer

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Matt Gaetz told reporters after a successful vote to oust Kevin McCarthy as House speaker that he is not personally interested in a speaker bid but would back the likes of Congressmen Steve Scalise or Tom Emmer.

“I have no desire to be speaker of the House,” Gaetz said on Tuesday, when asked if he intends to run for the vacant leadership role.

Either Scalise or Emmer would make good speakers, Gaetz said. Gaetz said that he spoke with Emmer but declined to disclose the content of their conversation.

Gaetz said that he would like to hear from Scalise regarding a potential speaker bid before nominating him. However, Scalise is the “type of person” Gaetz could see himself supporting, the lawmaker said.

Earlier on Tuesday, the House of Representatives passed a motion to vacate McCarthy as speaker, leaving the lower chamber leaderless amid attempts to pass full government funding legislation before short-term spending measures expire.

Gaetz opposed the passage of a short-term measure backed by McCarthy and alleged that the former speaker made a secret deal with President Biden on Ukraine aid as part of government funding negotiations. McCarthy denies having made such a deal.

McCarthy does not have the necessary votes to resecure his role as speaker, Gaetz said.
Congressman Patrick McHenry Will Temporarily Lead US House After McCarthy Ousted

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - Congressman Patrick McHenry will begin temporarily leading the House of Representatives following the lower chamber of Congress’ decision on Tuesday to oust Kevin McCarthy as speaker.

McHenry will serve as speaker pro tempore while the House of Representatives works to select a new leader. House lawmakers are unable to conduct other legislative business until they select a speaker.

McCarthy included McHenry on a list of lawmakers to serve as speaker in his absence. McHenry is only authorized to recognize speaker nominations, declare the chamber in recess or adjourn it.

McCarthy was the first House speaker in history to be kicked from the position. The situation comes amid efforts by Congress to pass full government funding measures before November 17, at which point a short-term spending measure would expire and the government would shut down.

US Congressman Matt Gaetz brought the motion to vacate McCarthy in response to the former speaker’s support for the short-term funding measure. Gaetz alleges that McCarthy made a secret deal with President Joe Biden on Ukraine aid as part of government funding negotiations, although McCarthy denies the accusations.

House lawmakers are now expected to meet with their respective party conferences to determine how to proceed. Such meetings would be “prudent” prior to speaker elections, McHenry said before declaring a recess.

US Approves Sale of 301 TOW Missiles to Oman for $70Mln - Defense Security Agency

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has approved the sale of more than 300 TOW 2B Radio Frequency missiles to Oman for $70 million, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) announced in a press release.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Oman of TOW 2B Radio Frequency Missiles (BGM-71F-7-RF) and Support and related equipment for an estimated cost of $70 million," the release said on Tuesday. The DSCA delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale earlier on Tuesday, the release also said.

"The government of Oman has requested to buy 30) Tube-Launched, Optically-Tracked, Wireless-Guided (TOW) 2B, Radio Frequency (RF) Missiles (BGM-71F-7-RF)," the release added.
The sale includes seven "fly-to-buy" missiles as well as US government and contractor technical, program, logistics and engineering support services, according to the release.

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Wall Street’s Dow Has Worst Day in 7 Months As Bond Market Melts, Dollar Jumps

NEW YORK, October 4 (Sputnik) - Wall Street had one of its worst day in seven months on Tuesday with industrial to growth stocks tumbling across the board amid a relentless selloff in bonds and surge in the dollar on concerns that US interest rates will continue rising in an economy that could still descend into recession.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, which serves as Wall Street’s broadest equities indicator with stocks of 30 large US corporations, closed down 431 points, or 1.3%, at 32,002. The last time the Dow fell more in a day was on March 9, when it fell 1.7%.

The S&P 500 Index, which represents the top 500 US stocks, dropped 59 points, or 1.4%, to 4,229. The last time the S&P fell more was a week ago, when it lost 1.5% on September 26.

The Nasdaq Composite Index, which comprises marquee names in technology such as Amazon, Apple, Facebook(banned organization in Russia), Netflix and Google, settled down 248 points, or 1.9%, at 13,059. That matched the Nasdaq’s tumble on August 24, when it also fell 1.9%.

Yields and the dollar received a new upshot after the Labor Department reported earlier on Tuesday that the number of job openings in the United States rose more than expected in August, chipping away at some of the confidence the Federal Reserve may have had in its fight against inflation.

An estimated 9.61 million jobs opened up in August, according to the Labor Department’s latest monthly Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, or JOLTS, report. In July, there were just 8.92 million openings. Wall Street economists polled by US media had predicted an August number of just around 8.8 million for job openings.

The JOLTS report came ahead of the more important September non-farm payrolls report scheduled for release on Friday by the Labor Department. The Fed will be watching that closely to help steer its decision on rates. The central bank has repeatedly said that jobs and wage growth have to cool in order to moderate inflation.

“US stocks tumbled after Treasury yields surged after a hot JOLTS report signaled the labor market is not breaking,” said Ed Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA. “A cooling labor market was expected to emerge, but the August job openings data showed a large pickup with vacancies. Unless, the NFP report comes in lower than expected, Wall Street will likely start to fully price in at least one more Fed rate hike before the end of the year.”

Still, the rally in yields and the dollar cooled somewhat after senior Fed policy maker Raphael Bostic said the central bank was in no rush to pile rate hikes on Americans to get inflation back under control — though he said a restrictive monetary policy will be necessary to keep spending and jobs growth from getting out of whack with the rest of the economy.

What’s more, Bostic, who’s the Atlanta Fed’s president, threw another bone at risk markets by
saying that there might even be a rate hike by the end of 2024. His words were more than a solace for longs in commodities and equities, desperate for a break from the fear factor of a super hawkish Fed that has gripped the investing world again after a respite in the second quarter. Coming ahead of a widely expected rate hike in either November or December — and after September’s pause — it was a sign the central bank might be done with newer rate hikes, after its 11 increases between March 2022 and July 2023. Aside from Bostic, the dollar’s surge was capped by a forex market intervention by the Japanese government to prop up the yen after the dollar-yen trade went above the 150 level.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, October 4 (Sputnik) -

US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
* The US House of Representatives on Tuesday ousted Kevin McCarthy as speaker of the lower chamber of Congress amid efforts to pass full government funding measures before short-term spending legislation expires.
* President Joe Biden is not engaging in the bid to oust McCarthy, but expects him to abide by his commitments, including the commitment to secure aid for Ukraine, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said.

ENERGY MARKETS
* Russian companies comply with the decree that bans selling Russian oil at a price cap, the crude is traded at market prices, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said.
* Russia’s ban on gasoline and diesel exports will remain in force for as long as it takes to stabilize the domestic market, Novak said.

UKRAINIAN ATTACKS AGAINST RUSSIA
* Russia’s air defense destroyed two shells fired from Ukrainian multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) and one drone over the Belgorod Region on Tuesday evening, the Defense Ministry said.
* Russia’s air defense systems detected and destroyed a Ukrainian Neptune missile near the Crimean coast, the Defense Ministry said in a statement.
* Russia’s air defense systems downed a Ukrainian fixed-wing drone over the Belgorod Region on Tuesday, the Defense Ministry said.
* Russia’s air defense systems destroyed a Ukrainian drone over the Bryansk Region on Tuesday, the Defense Ministry said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* The Biden administration has enough money to meet Ukraine’s needs for a little bit more time,
but the Congress must make sure there is no disruption in the United States' support for Kiev, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Tuesday.

* US President Joe Biden had a call on Tuesday morning with allies and partners to coordinate on the issue of the ongoing support for Ukraine after Congress left Kiev without any additional funding for the next 45 days, the White House said.

* Unexploded Ukrainian munitions have been found on path of observers of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) during their rotation at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (ZNPP), the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* Ukraine has lost up to 285 military in the Donetsk direction over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

**SPACE PROGRAMS**

* Russia's state space corporation Roscosmos is considering options for shifting the launch of next lunar missions to earlier dates, Roscosmos head Yuri Borisov said on Tuesday.

* Russia's state space corporation Roscosmos has offered Brazil, Turkey and South Africa to join Russia's orbital station project, Borisov said.

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US House of Representatives Ousts Kevin McCarthy as Speaker in Historic First

(Update: adds details, background in paras 5-7)

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives on Tuesday ousted Kevin McCarthy as Speaker of the House, leaving the lower chamber of Congress leadership amid efforts to pass full government funding measures before short-term spending legislation expires.

House lawmakers adopted a motion to vacate McCarthy as speaker in a vote of 216 in favor and 210 opposed. The motion was brought by Congressman Matt Gaetz in response to McCarthy backing the short-term government funding deal.

Gaetz alleges that McCarthy agreed to a secret deal regarding Ukraine aid with Biden as part of government funding negotiations, although McCarthy denies the accusation.

Congress has until November 17 to pass full appropriations measures, lest the federal government again risk a shutdown.

The House of Representatives has never before ousted a sitting speaker. The lower chamber has not held a floor vote to remove its leader in more than a century.

House rules require lawmakers to elect a new speaker before they can conduct any further business. The House of Representatives held 15 votes to elect McCarthy as speaker in the longest such election since 1859.

Republicans hold a 221-212 majority in the House of Representatives. A candidate for speaker must secure a simple majority of present and voting members, set at 218 for a full 435-member vote; however, there are currently two vacant House seats.
WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the heads of the departments of Justice and Homeland Security will be flying to Mexico City on Wednesday for talks with top Mexican government officials on battling the fentanyl crisis, US Attorney General Merrick Garland said during a press conference on Tuesday.

"Tomorrow, the secretaries [of Homeland Security Alejandro] Mayorkas, Blinken and I will be traveling to Mexico City to meet with our government and law enforcement counterparts to discuss the most urgent threats facing our countries," Garland said.

The still escalating fentanyl abuse and deaths crisis in the United States will be the top item for discussion in the talks, Garland said.

Blinken, Mayorkas and Garland will also discuss with their Mexican counterparts the issue of disrupting the drug cartels operations in manufacturing and trafficking, Garland said.

"Fentanyl will be at the top of this list," Garland also said.

Precursors drug chemicals to make fentanyl are still flooding into Mexico from China and then the Mexican cartels process it and smuggle huge quantities across the border into the United States, Garland added.

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives on Tuesday ousted Kevin McCarthy as Speaker of the House, leaving the lower chamber of Congress leadership for the first time amid efforts to pass full government funding measures before short-term spending legislation expires.

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Gaetz alleges that McCarthy agreed to a secret deal regarding Ukraine aid with Biden as part of government funding negotiations, although McCarthy denies the accusation.

Congress has until November 17 to pass full appropriations measures, lest the federal government again risk a shutdown.
US Indicts 8 China Companies for Making Fentanyl Precursors - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The US government has issued indictments against eight China-based chemical manufacturing companies and employees for producing precursor chemicals needed to make fentanyl, Biden administration officials said during a press conference on Tuesday.

"We know that the global fentanyl supply chain, which ends with the deaths of Americans, often starts with chemical companies in China," US Attorney General Merrick Garland said. "The United States government is focused on breaking apart every link in that chain, getting fentanyl out of our communities, and bringing those who put it there to justice."

Fentanyl is the leading cause of death for Americans ages 18 to 49 and from February 2022 to January 2023, at least 105,263 Americans died of drug overdoses, the majority of which involved synthetic opioids such as fentanyl and fentanyl analogues, he said.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas told the press conference that the international dimension to the deadly scourge of fentanyl requires the all-of-government response that the administration is delivering today.

"[W]e are bringing accountability to ruthless organizations and individuals resident in the People’s Republic of China and to the cartel members that seek to profit from the death and destruction that fentanyl causes," Mayorkas said.

Fentanyl is the deadliest drug threat the United States has ever faced, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Administrator Anne Milgram told the press conference. The Biden administration was therefore deploying a whole-of-government approach, sharing intelligence and combining resources to attack the global supply chain fueling the crisis, she said.

Fentanyl is said to be 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine; a dose of as little as two milligrams can kill a grown adult. Fentanyl analogues are similar in chemical structure and effects to fentanyl.

From February 2022 to January 2023, at least 105,263 Americans died of drug overdoses, the majority of which involved synthetic opioids such as fentanyl and fentanyl analogues.

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Laphonza Butler Sworn in as First Black California Senator Succeeding Feinstein

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - Laphonza Butler has been sworn in as California’s Senator on Tuesday in the US Senate, following the death of Senator Dianne Feinstein last week.

Butler’s addition to the Senate makes her the only Black woman currently serving in the chamber.

Butlers takes the position during a time of mourning and remembrance for Senator Feinstein, recognized for her extensive and impactful service as California’s senior Senator and the longest-serving woman senator to date.
Kirby Says US Watching China-Russia Arctic Cooperation, Nobody Seeking Conflict There

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is very closely monitoring Russian-Chinese economic and scientific cooperation in the Arctic and believes that a conflict in this region is in no one's interest, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Tuesday.
"Nobody’s looking for conflict up there [Arctic]. We’ll watch this as closely as we can," Kirby told reporters, when asked about increased Russian-Chinese cooperation in the region.
Kirby said that the focus of the collaboration between the two nations in the Arctic has primarily been in the economic and scientific domains.
This cooperation warrants no change to US posture and policy with respect to seeking opportunities for everyone to benefit from the Arctic, Kirby stated.

Libya Flooding Underscores Need for Political Decisions to Combat Climate Change - IFRC

UNITED NATIONS, October 3 (Sputnik), Lenka White - The case of the floods in Libya was a huge wake up call for the world and the need for political commitments to decrease future suffering, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) spokesperson Tommaso Della Longa told Sputnik.
"So I think that what we said [the case of disastrous flooding in Libya] is that this is a great wake up call for the international community because it’s clear that the climate has already changed. We, all humans, unfortunately have already changed it. So we need a political decision to decrease suffering and avoid that this will increase suffering around the world," Longa said on the General Assembly sidelines.
During the United Nations General Assembly, the IFRC presented a study saying that humans caused climate change and that the risk of heavy flooding is 50% more likely to cause human suffering.
Torrential rains hit Libya on September 10, brought by Storm Daniel. They caused destructive flooding in the country’s east, where the cities of Susah and Derna were declared natural disaster zones. The death toll is at thousands and continues to rise as thousands more are still missing. Over 43,000 people have been forced out of their homes, the International Organization for Migration estimated on Wednesday.
US Sanctions 28 People, Entities Allegedly Involved in Chinese Drug Network - Treasury

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The US government sanctioned 28 entities and individuals linked to a Chinese network implicated in the global production and distribution of illicit drugs, the Treasury Department said on Tuesday.
"Today, the US Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated 28 individuals and entities involved with the international proliferation of illicit drugs, including a China-based network responsible for the manufacturing and distribution of ton quantities of fentanyl, methamphetamine, and MDMA precursors," the department said in a statement. "Those designated by OFAC today are also involved in the global trafficking of xylazine and 'nitazenes,' which are highly potent and often mixed with illicit fentanyl or other drugs."

The recent sanction surge by the Treasury targets the illicit fentanyl supply chain and highlights key entities in China and Mexico, emphasizing the need for unified authority efforts to disrupt precursor networks and financial pathways of illegal drug profits, the statement said.

Furthermore, the 12 entities and 13 individuals implicated are allegedly engaged in the widespread dissemination and trafficking of substantial amounts of illicit drugs, including fentanyl, methamphetamine, and MDMA precursors, and xylazine, operating in a network with ties not only in China but also in Canada, the statement said.

Moreover, the US Attorneys Offices for the Southern and Middle Districts of Florida have simultaneously released indictments, aligning with the Treasury’s sanctions and displaying collaboration across various government agencies, specifically targeting 25 entities and individuals in China and three in Canada, the statement added.

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Biden in Call With Kenyan President Praises Work to Launch Multinational Mission in Haiti

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden had a telephone call with his Kenyan counterpart William Ruto to thank him for his initiative to bring a multinational mission to Haiti to bolster security in the country, the White House said on Tuesday.
"President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. spoke with President William Ruto of Kenya today to thank him for answering Haiti’s call to serve as the lead nation of the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission," the White House said in a press release. "They welcomed the successful vote at the United Nations Security Council yesterday authorizing the MSS to bring relief to the people of Haiti, who have suffered for far too long at the hands of violent criminals."

The two leaders also discussed additional opportunities to promote regional security and mutual prosperity by spurring new investments, jobs, and sustainable growth, the release said.

On Monday, the UN Security Council approved a resolution to deploy a task force to Haiti in cooperation with the Haitian government. The measure was approved with 13 votes in favor, with Russia and China abstaining.

The task force is supposed to cooperate and closely coordinate activities with the Haitian
government as well as provide support to the Haitian National Police during security-related operations and in the protection of infrastructure.

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US House Advances Effort by Congressman Gaetz to Oust McCarthy as Speaker

(Adds details, background in paras 4-6)
WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives on Tuesday advanced an effort by Congressman Matt Gaetz to oust Kevin McCarthy as Speaker of the House, following his decision to pass a short-term government funding bill over the weekend despite objections from some House Republicans.

House lawmakers rejected a motion to table Gaetz’s motion to vacate McCarthy as speaker in a vote of 208 in favor and 218 opposed. Eleven Republicans and all voting Democrats supported advancing the measure to oust McCarthy.

Gaetz filed the motion to vacate after McCarthy reached a deal to pass a short-term government funding deal ahead of a government shutdown set to start at the beginning of October.

Gaetz alleges that McCarthy agreed to a “secret Ukraine side deal” with US President Joe Biden as part of negotiations. McCarthy denies the existence of such an agreement.

Gaetz’s effort to oust McCarthy coincides with reported efforts by some House Republicans to prepare to expel Gaetz from Congress, pending the results of an ethics probe.

US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene has criticized both the effort to oust McCarthy and to expel Gaetz as “absurd drama” that harms Republicans’ ability to lead the House of Representatives.

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Canada's House of Commons Elects New Speaker

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The Canadian House of Commons (HoC) on Tuesday elected Greg Fergus as its new speaker after his predecessor resigned amid the scandal surrounding the celebration of a Ukrainian Nazi veteran in the parliament.

"The #HoC welcomes the Honourable Greg Fergus as the new Speaker of the House of Commons and Chair of the Board of Internal Economy," the House said on social media.

A liberal member of parliament, Fergus is the first black Canadian speaker.

His predecessor, Anthony Rota, resigned following criticism for inviting a former Ukrainian soldier who fought in a Nazi division to attend Volodymyr Zelenskyy's address at the Canadian parliament. Yaroslav Hunka, 98, was introduced as a hero for fighting against the Russians during World War II and received standing ovations from parliamentarians.
The honoring of a Nazi veteran prompted outcries from Russia, Poland and worldwide, with senior Russian and Polish officials suggesting Hunka should be extradited to face justice in a court of law. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov insisted that Hunka's crimes had no statute of limitations.

The Israeli Anti-Fascist Movement has urged the Canadian authorities to disclose information about Nazi criminals who took refuge in the country after World War II and bring to justice those of them who are still alive.

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US Monitoring Serbian Forces Staged on Kosovo Border, Some Have Withdrawn - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is monitoring Serbian forces staged along the border with Kosovo and has noticed some withdrawal of forces since last week, State Department Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Tuesday.

"We've been monitoring an unprecedented staging of advanced Serbian artillery tanks and mechanized infantry units along the border with Kosovo, and we've called on Serbia to withdraw forces from the border and lower tensions as well," Patel said during a press briefing. "We've noticed some withdrawal of forces and material along the border of Kosovo since September 29."

However, Patel noted that the United States remains deeply concerned about the rising cycle of tensions and sporadic violence in northern Kosovo.

White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby in a separate press briefing said that even since the Biden administration talked publicly about Serbia's presence near Kosovo, its forces have backed off.
"Since we stated publicly that we had seen Serbian forces on the border, we have also seen
them start to move those forces away and that's a good thing," Kirby said. "That will help
deescalate the tensions, won't eliminate them, but it'll help deescalate."
Kirby said last week that in light of the recent escalation in Kosovo, NATO intends to expand
the NATO-led Kosovo Force's presence in the self-proclaimed republic to ensure security along
its border with Serbia.
On September 24, Kosovar Prime Minister Albin Kurti said that unidentified people opened fire
on Kosovo police officers in the northern municipality of Zvecan, killing one and wounding
another. On September 25, the Kosovo prosecutor's office said that a fourth Serb had been
found dead in clashes in the Bajske village. The Serb List minority party demanded a full and
impartial investigation into the deaths during the Kosovar police's operation and the clashes in
Bajske.

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China Ready to Work for Fruitful APEC Summit, No Info on Participation Level - Embassy

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - Beijing is prepared to work with other nations on holding a
fruitful Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation's (APEC) Economic Leaders’ Week in San
Francisco, but there is no announcement yet on the country's representation at the gathering, a
spokesperson for China's embassy in the US told Sputnik.
"We value APEC's role as an important multilateral economic cooperation mechanism and
stand ready to work with other parties for a fruitful APEC summit," the spokesperson said on
Tuesday. "If there is any information about China's participation, we will release it in due
course."
In September, US National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby
said that US President Joe Biden intended to hold a face-to-face meeting with Xi, but it was not
yet clear whether such a meeting would take place on the sidelines of the upcoming APEC
summit in San Francisco in November.
The United States has informed Russia that it is not going to invite a number of leaders,
including President Vladimir Putin, to the APEC summit in San Francisco scheduled for
November 11-17, APEC Senior Official Marat Berdyev told Sputnik last week.

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White House Says Unaware of Ukraine Harming Civilians With US Cluster Munitions

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The United States has seen no indications that Ukraine
has harmed civilians using US-provided cluster munitions, National Security Council Strategic
Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday.
"I'm not aware of any indications that we've seen that there's been civilian harm as a result of them [cluster munitions]," Kirby said during a press briefing.
Kirby said that he could not preview whether cluster munitions would be included in future US aid packages.
Cluster munitions have been a "significant enabler" of Ukrainian efforts to break through Russian defensive lines, Kirby said.
The Pentagon has told the White House that Ukrainians are using cluster munitions appropriately to strike Russian command-and-control sites and large formations of Russian troops, Kirby said.

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US Senators Investigate Transfer of Executives Between TikTok, ByteDance - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - US Senators Marsha Blackburn and Richard Blumenthal have directed inquiries toward the Chinese social media company TikTok, focusing on the recent transition of executives from its parent company ByteDance, the Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday.
The US authorities have routinely scrutinized TikTok for fear the Chinese government may leverage user data or manipulate the platform to disseminate propaganda, the report said.
The senators' inquiry links with ongoing discussions about TikTok's "operational autonomy," especially its relationship with the Beijing-based ByteDance, the report also said.
Several executives have transitioned from ByteDance to TikTok this year and assumed pivotal roles within the company and, in some cases, relocated from Beijing to the United States with their teams, the report added.
The senators said in the letter that they seek responses from TikTok to their inquiries by October 13, according to the report.

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White House Says Ukraine Could Struggle to Receive Other Aid if US Funding Lapses

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - Ukraine could struggle to receive aid from other countries if aid from the United States lapses due to congressional inaction, National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday.
"Without our support, it's not inconceivable that some of that other support would be harder for Ukraine to achieve," Kirby said during a press briefing.
The US has "incredible convening power" to organize assistance efforts for Ukraine, Kirby said.
The US has a couple of months of funding remaining to support Ukraine, after which there would be a lapse in assistance unless US lawmakers pass a new aid package, Kirby said.
WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is not engaging in the bid to oust US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, but he expect McCarthy to abide by his commitments, including the commitment to secure aid for Ukraine, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"That's not something that the President is gonna get involved in, or necessarily be overtly concerned about right now," Kirby said. "The President looks forward to working with Congress to ensure that we make good on our commitment and he has every expectation that speaker McCarthy will keep his public commitment to secure the passage of the support needed to help Ukraine at this critical moment."

Kirby Says Enough Funds to Meet Kiev's Needs a Bit Longer, But Congress Must Take Action

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has enough money to meet Ukraine's needs for a little bit more time, but the Congress must make sure there is no disruption in the United States' support for Kiev, White House National Security Council Coordinator John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"As President Biden made clear we cannot under any circumstances allow America's support for Ukraine to be interrupted," Kirby said. "We have enough funding authorities to meet Ukraine's battlefield needs for a bit longer. But we need Congress to act to ensure that there is no disruption in our support."

When asked about the specific timeline, Kirby said that the existing funding authorities will suffice for a couple of months or so.


WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - A 70-year-old California telecommunications consultant of Iranian background has pleaded guilty to violating US sanctions on Iran, the US Justice Department announced on Tuesday.

"Farhad Nafeiy, 70, of Alamo, California, was charged with and pleaded guilty [on Monday] to a
According to court documents, Nafeiy obtained licenses or approvals from the Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) for advising non-Iranian telecommunications companies on doing business with Iran, the release said.
However, the licenses did not authorize Nafeiy to provide any hardware, software or technology directly to Iran, the release said.
"Nafeiy exceeded his OFAC licenses, thereby violating the ITSR and IEEPA, by directly providing software upgrades to telecommunications equipment in Iran," the release said.
In his plea agreement, Nafeiy admitted that the total amount of sales of such software upgrades to Iran was around $400,000, the release added.
Nafeiy separately was charged with, and admitted to, evading federal income taxes and specifically not paying income tax on some of the proceeds of the sales, according to the release.

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US Job Openings Exceed Expectations in August, Renewing Fed Worry About Inflation

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The number of job openings in the United States rose more than expected in August, according to a government report that likely chipped away at some of the confidence the Federal Reserve may have had in its fight against inflation.
An estimated 9.61 million jobs opened up in August, according to the Labor Department's latest monthly Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, or JOLTS, report. In July, there were just 8.92 million openings.
Wall Street economists polled by US media had predicted an August number of just around 8.8 million for job openings.
"More than just raw unemployment data, JOLTS offers a granular view of labor dynamics, reflecting the health and fluidity of the job market," economist Adam Button wrote on the ForexLive platform, responding to the upbeat job openings number. "Market participants keenly watch it not only for insights into employment trends but also for signals about wage pressures and potential shifts in monetary policy."
And the signals from this job openings report is that the labor market isn't slowing quickly enough for the Federal Reserve to take its feet off the rate hike pedal.
The JOLTS report came ahead of the more important September non-farm payrolls report scheduled for release on Friday by the Labor Department. The Fed will be watching that closely to help steer its decision on rates. The central bank has repeatedly said that jobs and wage growth have to cool in order to moderate inflation.
US inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, hit 40-year highs of more than 9% in June 2022 before falling to as low as 3% by June this year. From there, it has started creeping again, reaching 3.7% in August, as high global oil prices bumped up fuel costs at home. In contrast, the Fed's target for inflation is just 2% per annum.
Last year’s runaway inflation was inherited from epic federal relief spending and loose monetary policy put in place after the 2020 coronavirus outbreak. In response to that, the Fed hiked rates 11 times between March 2022 and July 2023, adding 5.25 percentage points to a prior base rate of just 0.25%.

While the central bank paused on an increase last month, it maintained projections that a quarter point hike was possible at either one of its remaining two policy meetings for this year, scheduled in November and December.

Since this week began, chatter has been on when that rate hike might occur. At least one policy-maker of the central bank — Raphael Bostic, who’s president of the Atlanta Fed — suggested on Tuesday that it was in no rush to pile rate hikes on Americans to get inflation back under control, though a restrictive monetary policy was necessary to keep spending and jobs growth from getting out of whack with the rest of the economy.

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Meta’s Oversight Board Says Will Open Case on Altered Video of Biden on Facebook

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The Oversight Board of Meta (banned in Russia for extremism) said on Tuesday that it will open a case related to an altered video of President Joe Biden on its social media platforms.

"In the coming days the Oversight Board will announce a new case regarding a user-appeal to remove an altered video of President Joe Biden on Facebook," Meta said in a statement via the social media platform X (formerly called Twitter).

This case will examine issues related to manipulating media on Meta’s platforms and the company’s policies on misinformation, the statement said.

However, Meta did not reveal which specific video was allegedly altered.

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Ex-US Lawmakers Charging Ukraine $25,000 Per Month to Lobby for Kiev Regime - Documents

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - Former US Congressman James Moran is charging Ukraine $25,000 per month to lobby on behalf of the Ukrainian government in the United States, according to documents recently brought to light.

"This letter of Agreement sets forth the parameters of the business relationship between Moran Global Strategies (MGS)... and the Advisory Office of the Ministry for Strategic Industries of Ukraine," a letter from MGS to the Ukrainian government said. "Subject to the terms of this paragraph, the Client will pay MGS a monthly fee of $25,000.00 for services provided."

MGS will provide strategic advice and assistance to the Ukrainian Ministry for Strategic Industries and support its interests within the US defense and intelligence sectors, a Foreign
Agents Registration Act (FARA) filing from September said. MGS will lobby the US Congress, the Biden administration and other political stakeholders to promote the long-term security of Ukraine, the filing said. US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene alleged that US taxpayer funds are being "funneled back to elites" through such lobbying relationships. "It's corruption at the highest level, and money laundering and murder at the same time. Stop funding Ukraine!" Greene said in a statement via the social media platform X (formerly called Twitter).

MGS will receive payment through the nonprofit organization Ukraine Freedom, the letter of agreement said, although no further details about the group were provided.

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Fed in 'No Hurry' to Hike Interest Rates But They Will Stay Higher for Longer - Bostic

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The US central bank is is "no rush" to pile interest rate hikes to get inflation back under control, though a restrictive monetary policy is necessary to keep spending and jobs growth from getting misaligned with the rest of the economy, Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta President Raphael Bostic said on Tuesday.

"There is no urgency for the Fed to do anything more," Bostic said. "We're not in a hurry to hike again, but also not in a hurry to cut and send a premature signal of policy easing."

US headline inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), hit 40-year highs of more than 9% in June 2022 before falling to as low as 3% by June this year. Since then, it has started creeping again, reaching 3.7% in August, as high global oil prices bumped up fuel costs at home. The Fed's target for inflation is 2% per year.

Last year's runaway inflation was inherited from huge federal relief spending and loose monetary policy put in place after the 2020 coronavirus outbreak. In response, the Fed hiked rates 11 times between March 2022 and July 2023, adding 5.25 percentage points to a prior base rate of 0.25%.

While the Fed paused on an interest rate increase last month, it maintained projections that a quarter point hike was possible at either one of its remaining two policy meetings for this year, scheduled in November and December.

Bostic said there was no need to be overly stressed about reaching the Fed's 2% target for inflation.

"Let's be patient, we don't have to get to 2% tomorrow," he said. "The Fed is in restrictive territory and that is helping inflation fall. As long as expectations don't spike the Fed can afford to be patient. The Fed should let the world move and be patient as long as inflation continues to slow. The economy is getting back into balance. The economy has been incredibly resilient, but the "fervor" of spending and investment has decreased."

Bostic also said a debate might be warranted on how realistic the 2% target is given the dynamics and challenges of today's economy versus pre-pandemic times.

"I would be open to a robust review of 2% after it has been reached," Bostic said. "There may
be reasons to reconsider the 2% target, but that will be a whole exercise that must come after reaching 2%. Once the Fed has chosen an inflation target it has to stick with it. Fed still has a way to go to get inflation back to (its original) target."
Fed Vice Chair for Supervision Michael Barr on Monday echoed the concerns raised by Bostic, saying more important would be the question on "how fast the economy will slow."
Barr said he did not dispute the need for a restrictive monetary policy, but also said that higher-for-longer rates did not mean higher-forever.
"In my view, the most important question at this point is not whether an additional rate increase is needed this year or not, but rather how long we will need to hold rates at a sufficiently restrictive level to achieve our goals," Barr said.
Fed Chairman Jerome Powell weighed in on the debate as well on Monday, saying the US economy was "still working through the impact of the pandemic" and needed time to stabilize.

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Pentagon Official Arrested for Being Member of Dog Fighting Ring for 20 Years – Reports

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The FBI arrested senior Department of Defense communications official Frederick Douglass Moorefield on charges of taking part in a dogfighting ring in the District of Columbia since at least 2002, The Washington Post reported on Tuesday.
Before being arrested on Thursday and suspended from the government service, Moorefield, 62, was a deputy chief information officer for command, control, and communications for the Secretary of Defense’s Chief Information Officer, the report said.
Moorefield and his friend Mario D. Flythe have been charged with promoting and furthering an animal fighting venture, according to the report.
While searching Moorefield’s house, investigators found five pit bull-type dogs and a range of accessories and gadgets related to dog fighting, including weighted collars and heavy metal chains used to increase fighting dogs’ strength, and apparatus for involuntarily insemiinating female dogs, the report said.
Both men were members of the dogfighting ring called "the DMV Board," according to an FBI affidavit cited in the report. Nine members of the ring were indicted in 2022 in the state of Virginia and eight more pleaded guilty and cooperated with investigators, according to the report.
Moorefield and Flythe were released after being arraigned, the report added.

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US Senator Says Schumer’s Trip to China ‘Really Important’ to Maintain Dialogue
WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The upcoming visit of a bipartisan US Senate group led by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer to China is "really important." Senator Mark Warner said on Tuesday.
He stressed the necessity of maintaining the dialogue and having people visit China. At the same time, the senator called for a distinction to be made between the "authoritarian leadership" of the country and its people, adding that otherwise, the Chinese diaspora may understand it as an anti-Chinese mood.
Warner also called for being "tough-eyed" with China and, while acknowledging that it is a great nation and the second largest economy in the world, recognizing that it is also stealing US intellectual property.
"We have to be realistic," Warner said. He also pointed out the importance of making clear that the US has ways to cooperate with China but intends to compete with it in different technology areas, such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing.
US media reported on Tuesday that Schumer will lead a bipartisan group of six senators who are heading to China later this week to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

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Hunter Biden Granted Conditional Release After Pleading Not Guilty to Gun Charges - Order

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - Hunter Biden has been granted conditional release after pleading not guilty to three felony firearms charges, according to a court order filed on Tuesday. Prosecutors allege that Biden lied about his illegal drug use when purchasing a handgun in 2018. Biden appeared at a US court in the state of Delaware to face arraignment on the charges, to which he pleaded not guilty.
Biden was granted release on conditions including: not committing any crimes; not possessing a firearm; cooperating with DNA sampling; appearing in court as required; communicating international travel plans; and submitting to drug tests, the court order said.
Biden faces up to 25 years in prison if convicted on the firearms charges. US President Joe Biden has said that he would not pardon his son if he were convicted.

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Flight PS752 Coordination Group Says Positions With Iran Too Far Apart to Solve Via Talks

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The International Coordination and Response Group for the victims of Ukraine International Airlines Flight PS752 said on Tuesday that the positions of its members and Iran are too far apart to be resolved via negotiations, Global Affairs Canada said in a statement on Tuesday.
"The group’s focus has always been on Iran’s responsibility for its violations of international law
and its obligation to make full reparation for the injury caused by the downing of Flight PS752. For the group, full reparation means more than financial compensation," the statement said. "It has not been possible to make meaningful progress. Iran continues to disregard our claims. Based on the discussions, that took place this week, the Group considers that our respective positions are too far apart to be reconciled through negotiations."

In July, Canada, Sweden, Ukraine and the United Kingdom collectively filed a lawsuit against Iran at the International Court of Justice over the 2020 downing of the Ukraine International Airlines Flight PS752.

The Coordination Group said in a statement that it will continue to pursue action to resolve this dispute in accordance with international law, including at the International Court of Justice, for as long as Iran refuses to take full legal responsibility.

"The families of the victims of Flight PS752 rightfully deserve transparency, justice and accountability for the tragic loss of their loved ones and for the suffering they continue to endure, and the Coordination Group remains committed to this pursuit," the statement said.

On January 8, 2020, flight PS752 crashed shortly after takeoff from Tehran’s international airport. It claimed the lives of all 167 passengers on board the airplane - mostly Canadian and Iranian citizens - and nine Ukrainian crew members.

The Iranian government admitted that the plane had been mistakenly shot down by its military, which mistook it for a cruise missile at a time when Iran’s air defenses were active following strikes on a US military base in Iraq.

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Biden Holds Call With Allies to Coordinate Ongoing Support for Ukraine - White House

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden had a call on Tuesday morning with allies and partners to coordinate on the issue of the ongoing support for Ukraine after Congress left Kiev without any additional funding for the next 45 days, the White House said. Leaders and officials from Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan, Poland, Romania, the UK, France, and the European Union joined Biden on the call, according to the White House.