

# VOA NEWS

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I'm VOA's Joe Ramsey with this worldwide news update.

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration on Wednesday appeared to abandon its proposed freeze on hundreds of billions of dollars in domestic aid amid legal setbacks and widespread opposition. Reuters correspondent Jillian Kitchener reports.

The White House Budget Office told federal agencies it was rescinding a memo that had ordered them to pause a wide swath of grant and loan payments. But officials said they still planned to block funding for activities opposed by President Donald Trump.

At a White House event, Trump said his administration had already identified and defunded unnecessary foreign aid programs.

"We are merely looking at parts of the big bureaucracy where there has been tremendous waste and fraud and abuse."

The proposed spending freeze threw the government into turmoil and disrupted payments to medical and child care providers before it was temporarily blocked by a federal judge.

Reuters correspondent Jillian Kitchener.

President Trump says he has a new use for Guantanamo Bay. AP correspondent Sagar Meghani reports.

The U.S. base in Cuba has been used to house terror detainees. The president's ordering the opening of a detention center there to hold illegal immigrants

"We're gonna send them out to Guantanamo," and says the facility will hold up to 30,000 migrants.

"This will double out capacity."

The president made the remarks moments before signing his administration's first law named after Laken Riley, a Georgia nursing student killed last year by an illegal immigrant. The law mandates those in the U.S. illegally and accused of violent crimes be detained and potentially deported even before conviction.

Sagar Meghani, Washington.

This is VOA News.

Former U.S. Senator Bob Menendez was sentenced Wednesday to 11 years in prison for his conviction for accepting bribes of gold and cash and acting as an agent of Egypt.

Crimes, his own lawyer said, earned him the nickname "Gold Bar Bob." AP correspondent Haya Panjwani reports.

Judge Sidney H. Stein announced the sentence after Menendez tearfully addressed the judge, saying he'd "lost everything" he cared about.

Prosecutors saw a 15-year term for the Democrat convicted of crimes, including acting as an agent of the Egyptian government.

Two New Jersey businessmen convicted with Menendez were sentenced earlier to seven and eight years in prison.

I'm Haya Panjwani.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., President Donald Trump's pick to lead the top U.S. health agency, came under attack for his anti-vaccine views at a contentious Senate confirmation hearing on Wednesday. Reuters correspondent Alex Cohen reports.

Here's an exchange he had with Democratic Senator Ron Wyden.

"I support the measles vaccine. I support the polio vaccine. I will do nothing as HHS secretary that makes it difficult or discourages people from taking either of those vaccines."

"Anybody who believes that ought to look at the measles book you wrote saying parents have been misled into believing that measles is a deadly disease. That's not true."

Democratic senators brought up a string of past statements from Kennedy, including that COVID-19 was targeted to attack Caucasians and Black people. Kennedy has also decried the U.S. food industry for adding ingredients he says make Americans less healthy and received a stern response to some of his statements from Republican Senator Chuck Grassley.

"I expect you to leave agricultural practice regulations to the proper agencies," while other Republican senators expressed support for Kennedy during and after the hearing.

Reuters correspondent Alex Cohen.

The leader of Syria's rebels who overthrew President Bashar al-Assad last month was named interim president on Wednesday. AP correspondent Donna Warder reports.

Ahmed al-Sharaa once led an Islamist insurgent group that was affiliated with al-Qaeda, but it has denounced its former ties in recent years.

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham led the fighting that toppled Assad in December, and al-Sharaa will lead Syria during the country's transitional phase.

A spokesman says Syria's constitution adopted in 2012 under Assad's rule has been canceled and that al-Sharaa will have the authority to form a temporary legislative council until a new constitution is drafted.

I'm Donna Warder.

That wraps up this update, but the world and news never stop. For additional updates, visit our website, [voanews.com](http://voanews.com). I'm Joe Ramsey, VOA News.