

VOA NEWS

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Hi, I'm VOA's Alexis Strobe with your worldwide news update.

Just hours before the U.S. government was set to shut down, the Senate passed a bill to keep the government funded through September 30.

"The yeas are 54, the nays are 46. The bill is passed." Audio courtesy of C-SPAN.

The bill now goes to President Donald Trump for signing.

It had little support from Democrats, but a last minute boost by Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer rallied enough Democrats to vote for the bill's passage, which they viewed as a better outcome than allowing the government to shut down despite their objections to many aspects of the bill.

Russia says it has responded to a U.S. cease-fire proposal. VOA's Christina Menenti has more.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Friday that Russian President Vladimir Putin asked U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff to relay Moscow's response to an American proposal for a 30-day cease-fire in Ukraine back to Washington.

Trump said in a Truth Social post on Friday, quote, "We had very good and productive discussions with President Vladimir Putin of Russia yesterday, and there is a very good chance that this horrible bloody war can finally come to an end," unquote.

Speaking with VOA, Jennifer Cavanagh is a senior fellow and director of military analysis at Defense Priorities.

"Putin really has a significant advantage here and has no incentive to stop pressing until he thinks he's gonna get a deal that he likes."

Secretary of State Marco Rubio told reporters Friday that peace is the ultimate goal.

"We don't think it's constructive for me to stand here today and begin to issue threats about what we're gonna do if Russia says no. Let's hope they say yes."

Moscow announced Friday that its forces recaptured another village as part of their efforts to push Ukrainian troops out of Russia's Kursk region, where Ukraine launched a surprise incursion last August.

That was VOA's Christina Menenti.

This is VOA News.

More hostages might be released in Gaza. VOA's Jeff Caster reports.

The U.S.-designated terrorist group Hamas said in a statement Friday it is willing to release an American-Israeli hostage, Eden Alexander, along with the bodies of four dual nationals who died in captivity.

The statement on Telegram did not say when the release would take place or what the group expected in return.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office is questioning the offer, accusing Hamas of trying to manipulate the ongoing cease-fire talks in Qatar. Netanyahu's office said the prime minister will meet with his ministerial team Saturday night to receive a detailed report from negotiators and decide on next steps for the release of hostages.

Jeff Caster, VOA News.

South Africa's ambassador to the United States is no longer welcome in the U.S. That's according to Secretary of State Marco Rubio in a post on X on Friday afternoon.

Rubio accused Ibrahim Rasool of being a "race-baiting politician" and declared him "persona non grata." No additional details were available from the State Department.

An executive order was signed in early February by President Donald Trump that cut aid to the Black-led South African government. Trump said South Africa's white Afrikaners were targeted in a new law that allows the government to "expropriate private land."

Tit-for-tat tariffs from Mexico, Canada, the EU and China continue as the U.S. is set to impose new tariffs on April 2. VOA's Carolyn Presutti has the story.

The unpredictability drives U.S. stocks wild. Analysts say if it continues, all governments lose.

Jeffrey Schott is with the Peterson Institute for International Economics.

"They think that if they protect their economy, they're going to increase the productivity and the competitiveness of industries in their own market. And actually what they're doing is putting them at a disadvantage in terms of price and access to global markets."

The U.S. argues economic pain now will yield great results later.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent: "... the tariffs, we've got strategic industries we've got to have. We wanna protect the American worker that a lot of these trade deals haven't been fair."

The administration is sending a signal that it's not business as usual here. It's now more exports and less imports.

The next round of tariffs goes into effect April 2.

Carolyn Presutti, VOA News, the White House.

Two astronauts who have been living on the International Space Station since June of last year are about to get their ride back to Earth.

SpaceX launched four astronauts from Kennedy Space Center in Florida on Friday night to the space station.

Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams have been on the space station since their Boeing Starliner capsule suffered a malfunction and returned to Earth without them. Wilmore and Williams are expected back on Earth next week.

That wraps up this update, but the world and news never stop. For additional updates, visit our website. I'm Alexis Strobe, VOA News.