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Democracy Dies in Darkness

TUESDAY, AUGUST 26, 2025 • \$4

## FEMA staff broadcasts a public warning

Letter: Administration’s moves harm agency and may lead to disaster

BY BRIANNA SACKS

More than 180 Federal Emergency Management Agency employees sent a letter Monday to members of Congress and other officials, arguing that the agency’s direction and current leaders’ inexperience harm FEMA’s mission and could result in a disaster on the level of Hurricane Katrina.

The letter, on which three dozen employees signed their full names, says that since January, staffers have been operating under leaders — Homeland Security Secretary Kristi L. Noem, acting FEMA administrator David Richardson and former leader Cameron Hamilton — who lack the legal qualifications and authority to manage FEMA’s operations. This has eroded and hindered the agency’s ability to effectively manage emergencies and other operations, including national security work, the letter says.

After Hurricane Katrina became one of the worst disasters in the nation’s history, in part because of failures by local, state and federal governments, Congress passed the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act to give FEMA more power and responsibility. The hurricane made landfall in southeast Louisiana in August 2005, leading to at least 1,800 deaths and \$100 billion in damage. The resulting legislation

SEE FEMA ON A7

## Edicts take aim at flag burning, bail policy

Issues are important to Trump’s base but may face legal challenges

BY EMILY DAVIES  
AND JENNY GATHRIGHT

President Donald Trump moved on two issues important to his conservative base Monday, signing executive orders aimed at ending cashless bail across the country and pushing courts to reconsider the legality of burning the American flag.

Under cashless bail, judges may release people accused of crimes without requiring monetary payment. Such releases are often accompanied by conditions — such as electronic monitoring — and are rarely granted in cases involving the most violent offenses.

One order from Trump directs his staff to withhold federal funding from states and local jurisdictions that have removed money from the bail process. He sees such policies as overly lenient; proponents say they are central to ensuring equitable treatment for people charged with crimes who lack resources.

The executive orders, unveiled Monday morning in a two-hour

SEE ORDERS ON A5

D.C.: Trump’s focus on crime in the city persists with new orders. B13



ANNA MONEYMAKER/GETTY IMAGES

Kilmar Abrego García and his wife, Jennifer Vasquez Sura, before his immigration check-in Monday in Baltimore.

## Tuition leaps for undocumented Texas students

BY MOLLY HENNESSY-FISKE  
AND JEREMY ROEBUCK

HOUSTON — Tens of thousands of undocumented students at public universities and community colleges in Texas are facing uncertainty and astronomically higher bills this fall after the Trump administration and state officials struck a deal to deny them in-state tuition.

The Justice Department is similarly seeking to end tuition breaks in several other states for students who are residents there but do not have legal status.

Texas had long extended the

Deal with DOJ led to policy reversal; officials now pressing more states

discounted rates to undocumented students living within its borders. The first-in-the-country measure, passed in 2001 with broad bipartisan support, endured even as the state’s leadership turned deeply red.

“If you say that we should not educate children who come into our state for no other reason than

that they’ve been brought there through no fault of their own, I don’t think you have a heart,” declared Rick Perry, then Texas’s governor and a presidential candidate, a decade after signing the Texas Dream Act into law.

Then came a Justice Department lawsuit this summer, with attorneys arguing that federal law preempts in-state tuition for undocumented students as long as any U.S. citizen is required to pay out-of-state rates. The case was settled within six hours and before any affected students had a chance to weigh in. Critics accused the two sides of being in

legal cahoots.

“Under federal law, schools cannot provide benefits to illegal aliens that they do not provide to U.S. citizens,” U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi said in announcing the complaint. “The Justice Department will relentlessly fight to vindicate federal law and ensure that U.S. citizens are not treated like second-class citizens anywhere in the country.”

The administration later filed separate lawsuits on the same

SEE TUITION ON A9

Democrats: House coalition eyes middle ground on border policy. A3

## Turning up pressure on Fed, Trump says he’ll fire board member

BY ANDREW ACKERMAN  
AND RACHEL SIEGEL

President Donald Trump moved to oust Federal Reserve governor Lisa Cook over unproven allegations of mortgage fraud, ratcheting up efforts to push the central bank to do his will.

In a letter to Cook he posted on

social media late Monday, Trump said he would seek to fire her immediately, citing his authority to remove Fed governors for cause, meaning malfeasance or some form of dereliction of duty.

The Trump administration has accused Cook of committing fraud in 2021 while seeking mortgages on two properties — on a

home in Michigan and a condominium in Atlanta — by describing both of them as her primary residence.

Cook has declined to comment on the allegations, which stem from mortgages she obtained before joining the Fed in 2022. But she said last week that she wouldn’t be bullied into resigning

from the seven-member Fed board, on which she is the first Black woman to serve. The Fed is set up to operate independently of the White House.

A Fed spokeswoman had no immediate comment. If Cook challenges the firing, she may have to hire a private attorney to dispute the president’s charges, a

potentially expensive proposition.

The firing, if successful, could give Trump a majority of allies on the Fed board and allow him to fulfill his goal of lowering interest rates, even as the Supreme Court has pushed back on his attempts to exert direct control over the

SEE FEDERAL RESERVE ON A17



DEMETRIUS FREEMAN/THE WASHINGTON POST

### Trump holds first meeting with South Korea’s leader

President Donald Trump shakes hands with South Korean President Lee Jae Myung in the Oval Office on Monday. Hours before the meeting, Trump suggested on social media that the U.S. might stop doing business with South Korea, but he was warmer in person. Story, A14

## AI private school comes to Va., for \$65K a year

Teacher-less institution’s pupils study for 2 hours, then turn to life skills

BY KARINA ELWOOD

The pitch by Alpha School is as innovative as it is sensational: For \$65,000 a year, students study for just two hours a day using adaptive apps and personalized lesson plans and spend their afternoons on life skills such as learning to ride a bike or financial literacy.

Instead of teachers, the students have “guides.” The AI-driven school, which is coming to Northern Virginia this fall and plans to enroll up to 25 students in grades K-3 at a campus near Dulles International Airport, sits at the intersection of two growing

spaces in education: alternative schooling and an explosion of online learning platforms used in nearly every corner of the education sphere, from public school classrooms to at-home supplement work.

“What we realized is that kids do not need to sit in class all day doing academics,” said MacKenzie Price, co-founder of Alpha School, which with three campuses across the country has become a very public piece of the push to incorporate more AI learning in schools.

Some of the online learning platforms, such as the model at Alpha, promote individualized instruction that meets each student where they are, regardless of grade level or classroom curriculum. Others fully embrace generative artificial intelligence with chatbots and tutors to assist

SEE ALPHA SCHOOL ON A8

## IN THE NEWS

**A close call with Erin** When it comes to large hurricanes that tracked near the East Coast, only one storm compares: Sandy. This time, the nation was spared a landfall. A22

**Terry McLaurin gets extension** The Commanders and their top wide receiver agree to a three-year, \$96 million deal. B7

### THE NATION

**A former leader** of the Sinaloa cartel pleaded guilty to drug-trafficking charges in New York. A2  
**An alcohol-fueled** street fight has stoked racial tensions in Cincinnati. A6

### THE WORLD

**In India’s diamond** capital, U.S. tariffs have brought business to a near-standstill. A12  
**Israel killed** at least 20 people in back-to-back strikes on Nasser Hospital in southern Gaza. A13

### THE ECONOMY

**SpaceX wants** to launch its Starship from Cape Canaveral, eliciting objections from rivals who fear their work will be disrupted. A15  
**Intel said** in a filing that the Trump administration’s 10 percent stake in the chipmaker presents business risks. A16

### STYLE

**A posthumous** memoir by Virginia Roberts Giuffre, an accuser of Jeffrey Epstein, will be released Oct. 21. B1

### SPORTS

**Eli Wilkitts**, the No. 1 pick in the MLB draft by the Nationals, isn’t your typical 17-year-old. B7

### THE REGION

**A rare human case** of screwworm was reported in a Maryland resident. B13  
**George Mason University’s** president won’t apologize for his DEI policies, his lawyer said, despite mounting pressure from the Trump administration. B13

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