

After attack, DOJ asks judge to let ballroom project proceed

BY LUKE BROADWATER AND ZACH MONTAGUE

NYT News Service/Syndicate Stories

WASHINGTON

The Justice Department filed a motion late Monday explicitly linking the security breach at the White House correspondents' dinner to the lawsuit over the president's ballroom project.

The motion, signed by the acting attorney general, Todd Blanche, and submitted by Stanley Woodward Jr., attacks the litigation against the ballroom the same way President Donald Trump has on social media. It asks Judge Richard J. Leon to backtrack and allow construction on the project to continue.

A court of appeals has already paused Leon's earlier ruling until arguments in June. But the Justice Department's latest motion makes an attempt to sway the litigation in the meantime, while taking the opportunity to flatter the president in dramatic terms.

"Because it is DONALD J. TRUMP, a highly successful real estate developer, who has abilities that others don't, especially those who assume the Office of President, this frivolous and meritless lawsuit was filed," the



Todd Blanche, acting attorney general, speaks at a news conference on Monday in Washington regarding the White House correspondents' dinner attack.

SALWAN GEORGES The New York Times

filing states. "Again, it's called TRUMP DERANGEMENT SYNDROME."

While parts of the motion are written in a traditional legal style, many sections are indistinguishable from the president's combative posts on Truth Social.

"The National Trust

for Historic Preservation' is a beautiful name, but even their name is FAKE because when they add the words 'in the United States' to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, it makes it sound like a Governmental Agency, which it is not," the motion begins.

In the motion, the Trump administration asked that Leon issue an indicative ruling — a non-binding opinion signaling how he would approach the question if the case were returned to him. Such a ruling could inform the appeals court before its decision but would not

immediately dissolve the earlier injunction or otherwise end the case.

There was little indication that Leon would do so, after repeatedly rebuffing government lawyers in court over claims that he could not intervene in matters involving national security.

Since the attempted attack at the dinner on Saturday, Trump and his allies have begun ramping up their push to dismiss the lawsuit filed by historic preservationists against the ballroom, which Trump has attempted to build without the approval of Congress. The lawsuit from the National Trust for Historic Preservation was filed after Trump abruptly tore down the White House's historic East Wing without seeking approval from any oversight body.

Shortly after a gunman was arrested rushing toward guests at the Washington Hilton, Blanche wrote a letter to the historic preservationists, demanding they drop the suit and accusing them of putting Trump's life at "grave risk."

The National Trust has declined to voluntarily drop the case, despite pressure from a constellation of conservative voices online.

In a letter to the Justice Department on Sunday, Gregory Craig, a lawyer representing the National Trust, rejected calls to dismiss the suit.

"What Saturday's awful event does not change is that the Constitution and multiple federal statutes require Congress to authorize construction of a ballroom on White House grounds, and that Congress has not done so," the letter said.

Even if pushed through at an accelerated timeline, the planned ballroom would not be ready for use until near the end of Trump's term.

Chatbots bill would mandate family accounts for kids, teens

BY ALLISON MOLLENKAMP

CQ-Roll Call/
The Tribune Content Agency

WASHINGTON

A bipartisan Senate bill unveiled Tuesday would govern kids' and teens' use of artificial intelligence chatbots by leaning on parental controls and would prohibit chatbots from using minors' data for targeted advertising.

The bill comes ahead of a Senate Judiciary Committee markup this week of a separate bill meant to address chatbots' harms to young users and as members on both sides of the aisle and the Capitol grapple with how to best protect kids online without infringing on freedom of speech.

The bill's unveiling also comes amid rising concern about AI ahead of the midterm elections and after recent testimony on Capitol Hill from parents of children who died by suicide after online interactions, including with AI chatbots.

Senate Commerce Chair Ted Cruz, R-Texas, sponsored the new legislation with Sens. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii, John

Curtis, R-Utah, and Adam B. Schiff, D-Calif., joining as co-sponsors.

The as-yet unnumbered measure, dubbed the "Children's Health, Advancement, Trust, Boundaries, and Oversight in Technology" or CHATBOT Act, would require providers of AI chatbots to allow parents to create "family accounts" for young users, according to a summary. The accounts would be required for children under 13 and optional for teens, though parents would still need to consent to teens' creation of a chatbot account.

In a statement, Cruz said the bill "ensures America leads in deploying AI safely and responsibly."

"The rapid development of sophisticated chatbots has left many parents in the dark as powerful AI systems enter children's lives," Cruz said. "Congress has an opportunity to put parents back in control. With the right safeguards, AI systems can benefit a child's education without putting their well-being at risk."

Family accounts would provide parents a range of controls, including:

- allow them to set their child's privacy settings.
- limit the amount of time the child spends talking to the chatbot.
- disable features like push notifications or rewards that can increase time spent.
- make the chatbot display a label to say it is not human.
- Parents would also be able to read a full record of their kid's conversations with the chatbot. If a teen user's parent decided not to use a family account, the controls would be set to their most protective level.

The bill represents a different approach to regulating children's use of chatbots than the measure up for consideration in the Senate Judiciary Committee on Thursday.

Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., sponsored that bill with support from a bipartisan group of five other senators. The legislation would require chatbot providers to verify users' ages and prohibit a chatbot from encouraging sexually explicit conduct or suicide. It would also ban AI companion chatbots for kids and require chatbots to regularly state they are not human.

Congress is considering other bills that would use variations on age verification or parental controls in an attempt to protect young people online.

"We'll have to try it," the president said.

A reporter asked Trump if astronauts will walk on the moon while he is still in office.

"We have a shot at it. We're ahead of schedule," Trump replied.

Isaacman responded: "We have an achievable plan. We're back in the business of launching moon rockets."

Artemis III, NASA's next human mission in the Artemis program, is scheduled for 2027. The mission will be a test flight in which a new group of astronauts will dock in Earth's orbit with a commercial lunar lander that's now in development by SpaceX and Blue Origin.

NASA is hoping to have astronauts land on the moon in 2028.

Lawmakers grill Hegseth about Iran in defense budget hearing

BY REECE DOWER

Medill News Service/
UPI.com

WASHINGTON

Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth alternated between championing a proposed massive increase to defense spending and fielding attacks from Democratic lawmakers during testimony on Capitol Hill on Wednesday.

It marked the secretary's first appearance before lawmakers since the start of a war that has roiled the global economy and decimated Iran's military.

Hegseth appeared before the House Armed Services Committee alongside Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Pentagon's comptroller, Jules Hurst III. They entered the hearing room past protesters' chants of "arrest Hegseth" and yells of "war criminal." The secretary appeared unfazed.

"We're rebuilding a military that the American people can be proud of — one that instills nothing less than unrelenting fear in our adversaries," Hegseth said in his opening statement.

Hegseth's testimony was intended to serve as a defense of the White House's petition to Congress for \$1.5 trillion in defense spending for 2027, a 44% increase from the 2026 budget.

It's an increase that, by itself, would be more than the total defense spending of any other nation, according to recently released figures. The spending level exceeds that spent on the Reagan-era military buildup and would be only overshadowed by levels seen during World War II.

The spending boom would come at the cost of domestic programs and at a time when federal tax revenue is set to take a \$4.5 trillion hit over the next 10 years, mostly from tax cuts codified in last year's One Big Beautiful Bill Act, according to the Bipartisan Policy Center, a Washington-based think tank.



BONNIE CASH UPI

Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth speaks during a House Armed Services Committee hearing on the Department of Defense's proposed fiscal year 2027 budget request at the U.S. Capitol in Washington on Wednesday. The Pentagon gave its first estimate of the cost of the U.S. conflict with Iran at \$25 billion.

But rather than question Hegseth on the specifics of the budget proposal, many Democratic members grilled him about the war in Iran, recent firings of senior leaders in the Pentagon and lethal strikes against alleged drug traffickers in the Pacific and Caribbean oceans.

In one heated exchange, Rep. John Garamendi, D-Calif., delivered a sharp critique of the war in Iran when questioning the defense secretary, calling it a "blunder" in which the United States had expended much to gain little.

Garamendi said it would take years for the U.S. and global economies to recover. The war has hiked average unleaded gas prices in the country to more than \$4.20 a gallon and inflation to its highest level in nearly two years.

"Secretary Hegseth, you have been lying to the American public about this war from Day 1," Garamendi said. "The strategy has been an astounding example of incompetence."

Hegseth counterattacked. With his voice raised, he accused the congressman of "handing propaganda to our enemies."

"I hope you appreciate how reckless it is," Hegseth said of Garamendi's description of the two-month-long war as a quagmire. "Shame on you."

Hurst, the comptroller, told lawmakers the Iran war has cost the Pentagon \$25 billion. Committee ranking member Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., responded that was the first time he had been given a cost figure, despite repeated inquiries to the department.

In March, the Pentagon reportedly petitioned Congress for an additional \$200 billion to replace stocks from the war and prepare for future operations, should they be ordered. When asked about it at the time, Hegseth indicated the report's veracity.

"That number could move, obviously," Hegseth said then. "It takes money to kill bad guys."

Hegseth's central defense of the war during the hearing was arguing that it served to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Republican members echoed his contention.

Iran maintains uranium supplies that could eventually be used to build a nuclear weapon if it were to be further enriched. But since the U.S. bombed Iran's nuclear facilities in June, Iran has made "no efforts since then to try to rebuild their enrichment capability," Tulsi Gabbard, the director of national intelligence, said in a written statement to Congress in March.

Artemis II crew visits with Trump in the Oval Office

BY LISA HORNUNG

UPI.com

The Artemis II astronauts visited the White House on Wednesday to meet with President Donald Trump, who praised their bravery.

"You captivated the attention of the whole world, not just our country, the whole world," Trump said to the four crew members. "They have a lot of rocket under them. I don't know how they do it. I wouldn't wanna do it. It takes people like this to make our country great."

NASA astronauts Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover and Christina Koch, and

Canadian Space Agency astronaut Jeremy Hansen flew around the moon earlier this month, traveling the farthest from Earth that any human has before.

During their flight home from the moon, Trump called the crew on April 6 and invited them to the White House. They also attended the State of the Union address in February.

Trump also congratulated NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman on the mission.

"Is a president allowed to go up on one of these missions?" Trump jokingly asked Isaacman.

"We can get working on that," Isaacman said.