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'Let Her Speak!': Trans Montana Lawmaker Stands Firm In Dispute

Montana Republicans want to silence Rep. Zooney Zephyr after she said they would have "blood on their hands" if they banned gender-affirming medical care.

AP AMY BETH HANSON and SAM METZ

Apr 24, 2023, 05:32 PM EDT

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — A defiant [Montana](#) Rep. Zooney Zephyr told supporters on Monday that she planned to continue to speak forcefully against legislation that members of the [transgender](#) community, including herself, consider matters of life and death.

"I was sent here to speak on behalf of my constituents and to speak on behalf of my community. It's the promise I made when I got elected and it's a promise that I will continue to keep every single day," Zephyr said on the steps of the Montana statehouse Monday before walking into the House chamber where she for days hasn't been allowed to speak.

As a standoff over Zephyr's fiery remarks moved into its second week, supporters waved pride flags and chanted "Let her Speak!" while she connected the transgender community's plight against gender-affirming care bans to the political fights animating other marginalized groups throughout the United States.

“When those communities who see the repercussions of those bills have the audacity to stand up and say, ‘This legislation gets us killed,’ those in power aren’t content with just passing those hateful harmful bills,” she said. “What they are demanding is silence. We will not be complicit in our eradication.”

Zephyr, a first-term Democrat from Missoula, hasn’t been allowed to speak on the statehouse floor since Thursday because she told her Republican colleagues last week they would have “blood on their hands” if they banned [gender-affirming medical care](#) for transgender youth.

Ban proponents see Zephyr’s remarks as unprecedented and personal in nature. She and her supporters say they accurately illustrate the stakes of the legislation under discussion, arguing that restricting gender-affirming care endangers transgender youth, who many studies suggest suffer disproportionately from depression and suicidality.

The standoff is the latest example of emergent discussions around civility, decorum and how to discuss political issues many perceive as life and death.

Zephyr [was silenced](#) and deliberately [misgendered](#) by some Republican lawmakers in response to her charge last week. She plans to keep trying to speak on the House floor Monday despite Republican leaders insisting that won’t happen until she apologizes. House Speaker Matt Regier and his Republican colleagues have indicated they have no plans to back down. Near the start of the proceedings Monday, they pushed an item Zephyr requested to speak on to the end of the agenda.



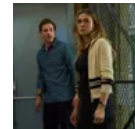
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A protester holds a poster calling for lawmakers to protect trans children by voting against House Bill 1125, which would ban gender-affirming care for trans children at the Mississippi Capitol in Jackson, Wednesday, Feb. 15, 2023. (AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis) VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

After speaking and before the House convened, Zephyr entered the crowd gathered at the statehouse to support her stand. A 21-year-old from a small southwest Montana town teared up as he told her about his fears of coming out as trans in his community. Others hugged her, thanked her for fighting and apologized that she had to do so.

Katy Spence, a constituent of Zephyr's who drove to the Capitol from Missoula on Monday, said the standoff was about censoring ideas, not decorum.

"She's been silenced because she spoke the truth about what these anti-trans bills are doing in Montana — to trans youth especially," she said of Zephyr.


Months after Zephyr became the first openly transgender woman elected to the Montana Legislature, the state joined a [longer list of legislatures](#) in passing new restrictions on transgender kids. Legislation this year has addressed issues ranging from the health care they can access to the sports teams they can play on, to the names they can go by. Though proceedings have been subjected to heated debate in more than a dozen statehouses, Zephyr's standoff with Republican leaders has given the legislative battles over transgender kids newfound attention.

As proceedings began, her supporters filled the statehouse gallery and supplemental Montana Highway Patrol stood by to monitor developments.

The dispute started last Tuesday when the House was debating Republican Gov. Greg Gianforte's proposed amendments to a measure banning gender-affirming care for minors. Zephyr spoke up in reference to the body's opening prayer.

"I hope the next time there's an invocation, when you bow your heads in prayer, you see the blood on your hands," she said.

House Majority Leader Sue Vinton, a Republican, immediately called Zephyr's comments inappropriate and disrespectful. That evening, a group of conservative lawmakers known as the Montana Freedom Caucus demanded Zephyr's censure and deliberately referred to



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her using male pronouns in their letter and a Tweet. That's known as misgendering — using pronouns that don't match a person's gender identity.

Zephyr previously upset legislative leaders with emotional testimony earlier this session.

The bill banning gender-affirming care for minors is awaiting Gianforte's signature. [He has indicated he will sign it.](#) The bill calls for it to take effect on Oct. 1, but the American Civil Liberties Union and Lambda Legal have said they will challenge it in court.

Montana's Republican-controlled Legislature is expected to finish for the year sometime next week.



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AP writer Sam Metz contributed reporting from Salt Lake City.

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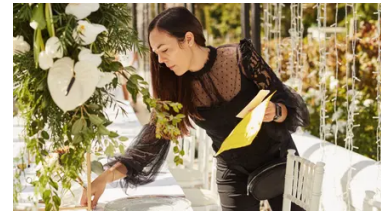
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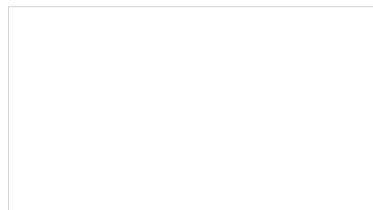
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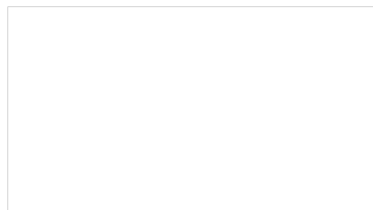
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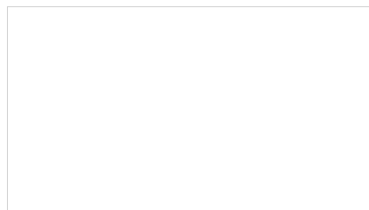
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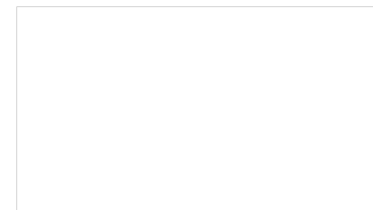
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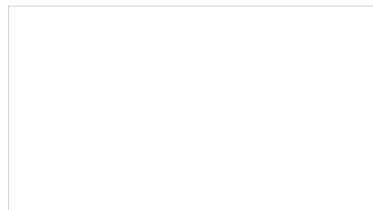
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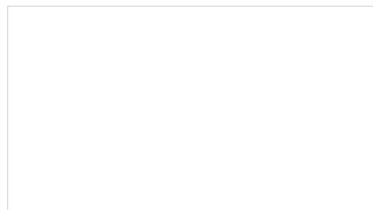
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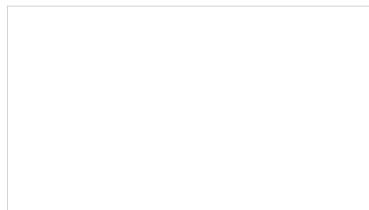
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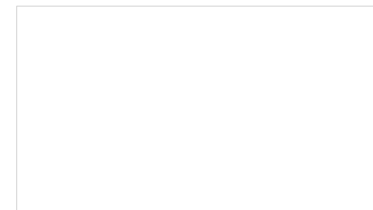
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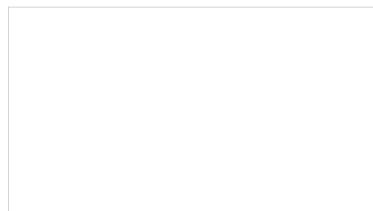
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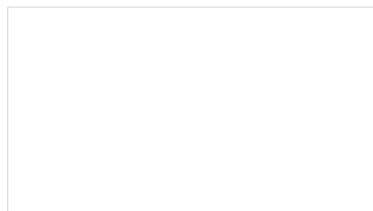
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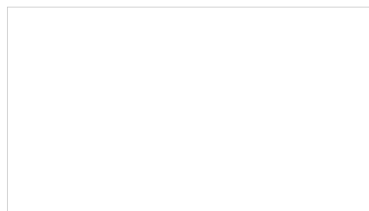
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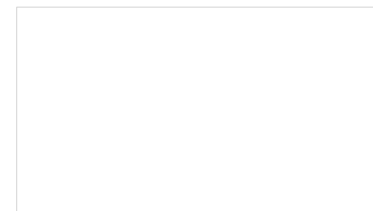
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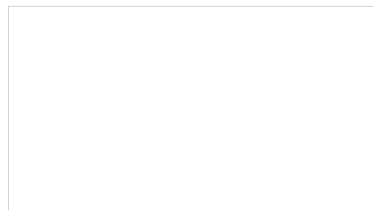
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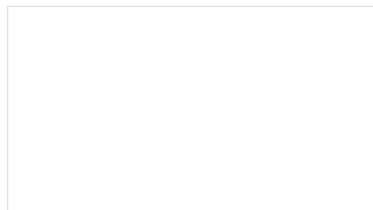
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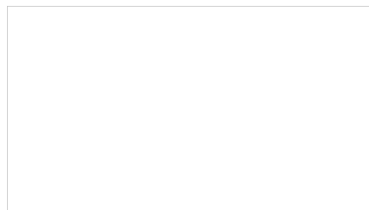
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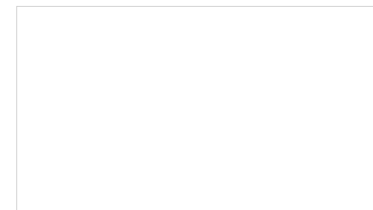
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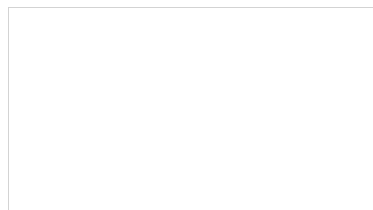
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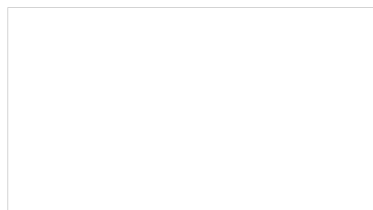
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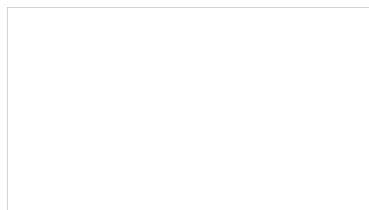
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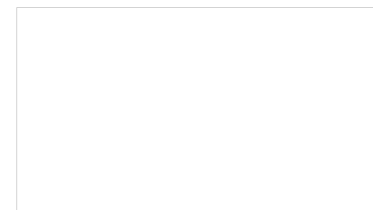
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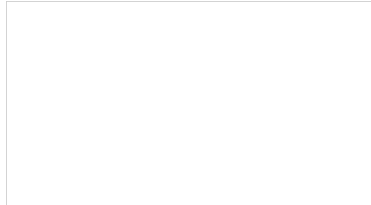
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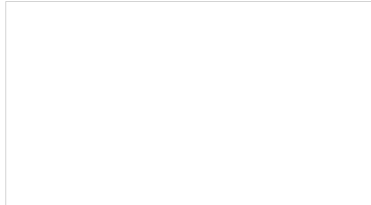
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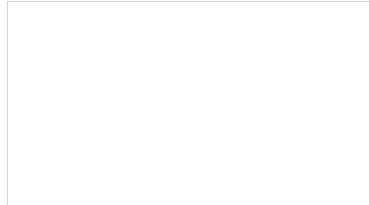
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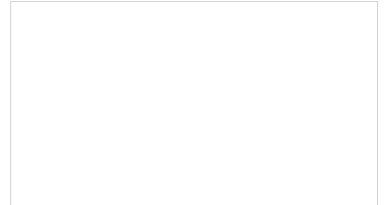
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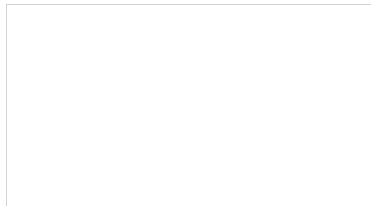
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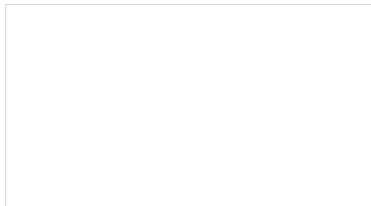
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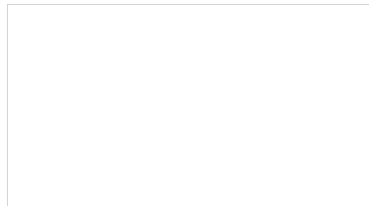
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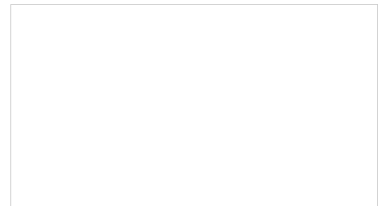
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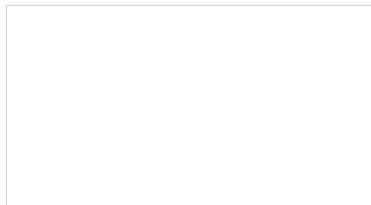
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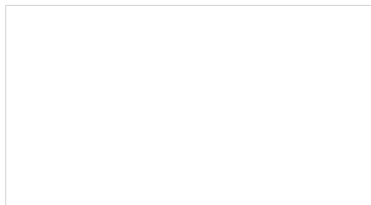
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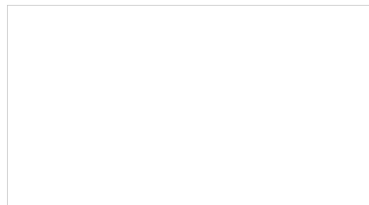
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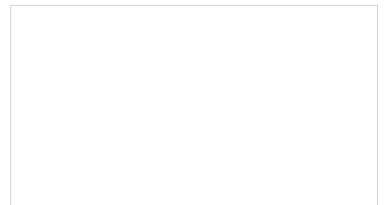
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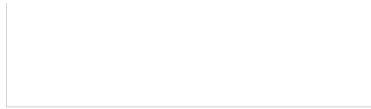


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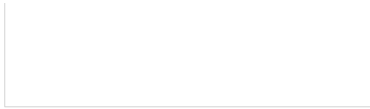


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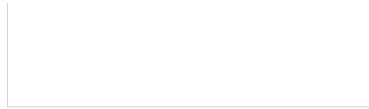




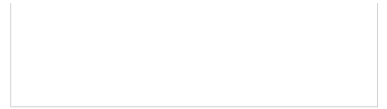
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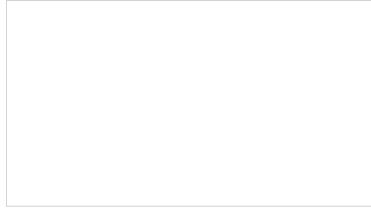
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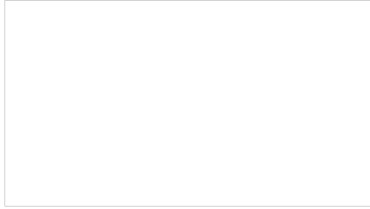
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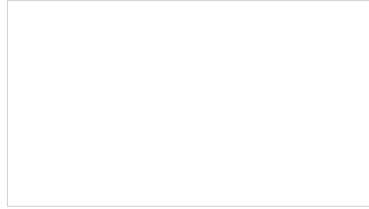
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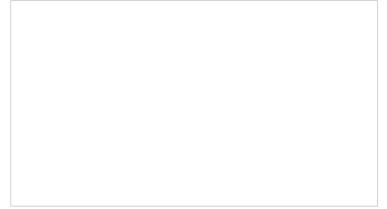
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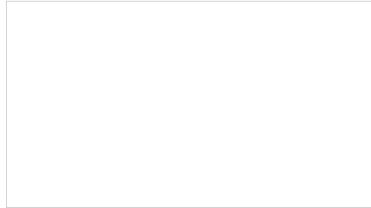
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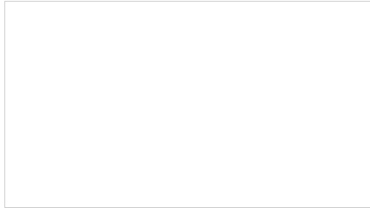
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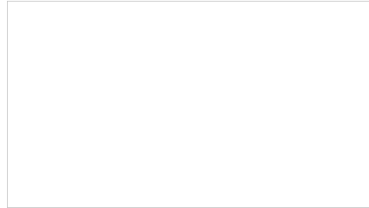
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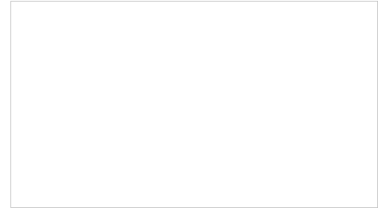
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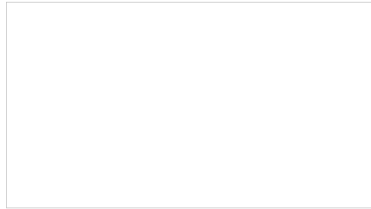
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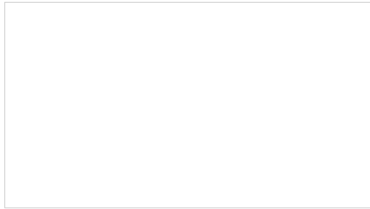
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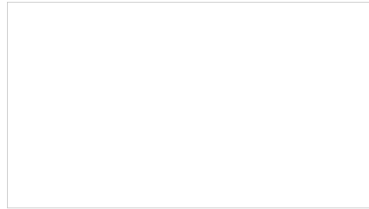
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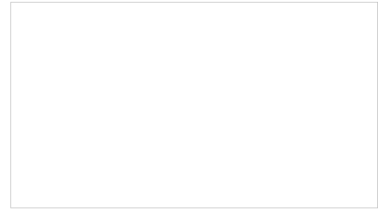
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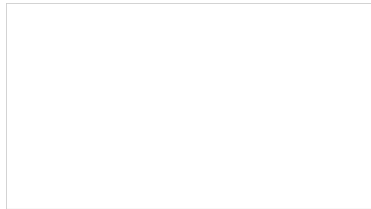
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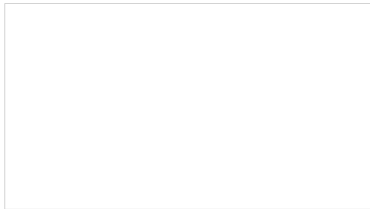
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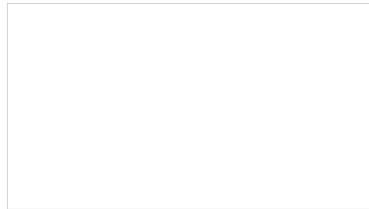
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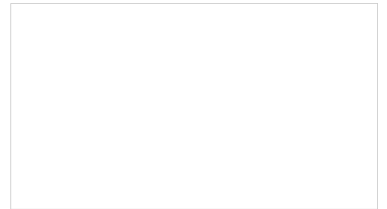
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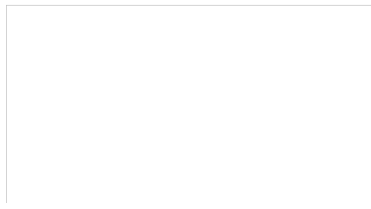
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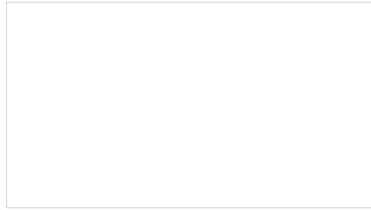
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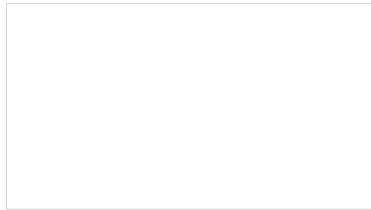
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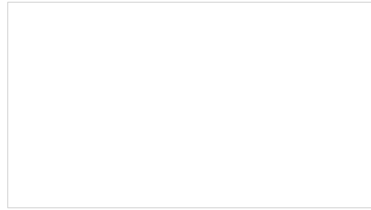


Chicago's New Mayor Is About To Make His Biggest Decision Yet

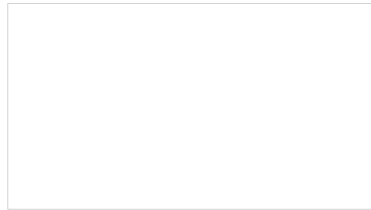


Brian Kilmeade Harshly Scolds Trump For Insulting Kayleigh McEnany

2 Democratic Senators Vote With GOP To Repeal Biden's Student Loan Relief Plan

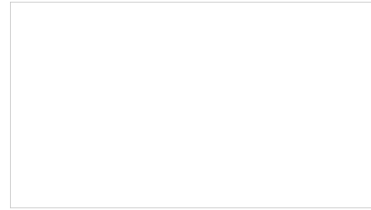


DOJ Sues Jim Justice's Coal Operation Over \$5 Million In Unpaid Fines

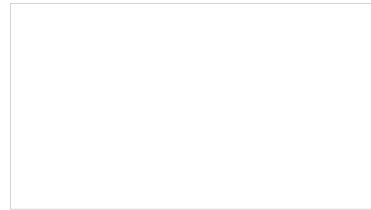


After Calling Joe Biden Senile, Republicans Complain He Outsmarted Them

Brother Of Tommy Tuberville Rebukes Senator's 'Vile Rhetoric' On Race

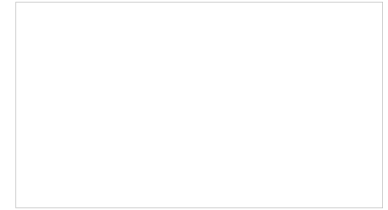


Supreme Court Skirts New Ethics Standards With Latest Orders

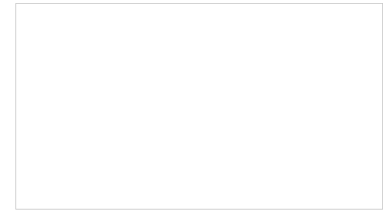


Chris Christie To Launch GOP Presidential Campaign Next Week

Greg Abbott Replaces Texas Attorney General Without Comment On Ken Paxton



Oklahoma High Court Strikes Down 2 Abortion Bans



Mother of Ashli Babbitt Arrested In Scuffle During Washington Protest

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