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OUTLOOK: 'Major, major questions': Senators briefed on Iran emerge with contrasting reactions

Plus: Administration nixes wilderness-protection rule, SCOTUS rules states can prevent Medicaid dollars from going to Planned Parenthood, and German automakers warn that tariffs could lead to them pulling out of the U.S.



Sens. Chris Murphy and Chris Van Hollen depart following a classified briefing at the Capitol Thursday on President Trump's directed strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities last weekend. (AP Photo/Rod Lamkey, Jr.)

Savannah Behrmann, Emily Scaff, Amelia Monroe and Cristina Maza

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Senators on Thursday received a classified briefing from the Trump administration on the details surrounding the attacks against Iran's nuclear facilities last weekend.

The effectiveness of those attacks was the lingering question hanging over the briefing. The answer varied depending on who was asked: Many Democrats after the briefing raised more questions, while most Republicans shared the White House's view of the operation as a success.

“Everybody's got their own words: ‘set back,’ ‘obliterated,’ ‘destroyed,’ ‘greatly diminished.’ It's all of those things, I would say. I think all those are accurate, depending on how you use any one of those terms,” Republican Sen. Kevin Cramer said. “I would say that it is severely set back.

“A year at the minimum,” he added.

Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy told reporters that he had “major, major questions” following the briefing, which was presented by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, CIA Director John Ratcliffe, and Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

“To me, it still appears that we have only set back the Iranian nuclear program by a handful of months. There's no doubt there was damage done to the program, but the allegations that we have obliterated their program just don't seem to stand up to reason,” Murphy said. “I just do not think the president was telling the truth when he said this program was obliterated. You’ve certainly damaged [the] program, but there's still significant remaining capability.”

Murphy also pointed out that Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard did not attend and that the briefing—which had been originally set for Tuesday—had been delayed. The postponement came shortly after a leaked [preliminary intelligence assessment](https://www.cnn.com/2025/06/24/politics/intel-assessment-us-strikes-iran-nuclear-sites) (https://www.cnn.com/2025/06/24/politics/intel-assessment-us-strikes-iran-nuclear-sites) said the attacks had only set Iran’s nuclear programs back by months. The Trump administration is [reportedly](https://www.axios.com/2025/06/25/iran-bombing-intelligence-trump-congress)

(https://www.axios.com/2025/06/25/iran-bombing-intelligence-trump-congress) planning to limit sharing classified information with Congress following that leak.

“I'm deeply worried about the politicization of intelligence right now. It seems to me that that [the leaked] report is right, that we set this program back a handful of months, and that is not obliteration,” Murphy said. “This briefing should have happened immediately after these strikes. There's a real question as to why the Director of National Intelligence is not allowed to be in these briefings. That's a question that we should get answered.”

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei made his first appearance since the attack on Iranian state television on Thursday morning and downplayed the damage.

“They could not achieve anything significant,” he claimed, as he remained in hiding.

Senators soon will be forced to vote on a War Powers Resolution that would require congressional approval for more military action in Iran. A vote is expected Friday evening.

And though it needs only a simple majority to pass—and some Republicans have considered supporting it—the resolution also sticks some pro-Israel Democrats with a tough vote.

Sen. John Fetterman, a Democrat who has lauded the attacks, said he would vote against the resolution.

“I would never want to restrict any future president, Republican or Democrat, to do this kind of military exercise,” Fetterman said.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer told reporters following the briefing, “I’ve always said that Iran can never have a nuclear weapon, plain and simple. President Trump said that the nuclear stockpile was completely and totally obliterated. I did not receive an adequate

answer to that question. What is clear is there was no coherent strategy, no end game, no [detailed] plan on how Iran does not attain a nuclear weapon.

“Anyone in that meeting, anyone—if they're being honest with themselves, their constituents, their colleagues—would know that we need to enforce the War Powers Act and force them to articulate an answer to some specific questions and a coherent strategy right away,” he said.

—[*Savannah Behrmann*](#) (/search/?

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📷 (AP Photo/Matthias Schrader, File) ASSOCIATED PRESS

European car companies may be forced to abandon U.S. market over Trump tariffs

BERLIN—With the July 9 deadline for U.S. trade talks with the European Union looming, industry insiders in Europe are urging the Trump administration to reconsider the steep tariffs it's threatening to impose on foreign manufacturers, arguing that they will harm U.S. consumers and workers.

Simon Schütz, the head of communications for the German Association of the Automotive Industry, said that conflict between the U.S. and the EU, which have the world's most significant trade relationship, will only produce "losers on both sides."

"The German car industry is already very active in the U.S. market. We have more than 140,000 employees in the U.S., and we produce almost 900,000 cars every year," Schütz said. "If there is a trade conflict, if there are countermeasures by the European Union, that will harm American wealth and American jobs, and I don't think anybody wants that."

Some German automakers would find it too costly to export to the U.S., thereby reducing the options available to U.S. consumers and increasing prices for U.S. car buyers, he argued.

Trade representatives from the U.S. and the European Union have [met frequently over the past few months](https://www.nationaljournal.com/s/728691/whats-at-stake-in-the-us-eu-trade-negotiations/) ([/s/728691/whats-at-stake-in-the-us-eu-trade-negotiations/](https://www.nationaljournal.com/s/728691/whats-at-stake-in-the-us-eu-trade-negotiations/)) to negotiate the terms of a trade deal. European officials had initially proposed zero-for-zero tariffs, but the Trump administration rejected that offer. European officials, speaking on background to discuss the matter candidly, say they expect tariffs on

European goods to remain in place once the negotiations conclude. The question is how high those tariffs will be. Europe has already prepared a list of potential countermeasures.

The U.S. is Germany's largest export market, and the German auto industry could be especially hard hit if steep tariffs remain in place after July. Companies such as BMW, Volkswagen, and Mercedes may be forced to choose between halting shipments to the U.S. or incurring a significant loss.

—[*Cristina Maza*](#) (</search/?a=Cristina%20Maza>).

The 'Roadless Rule' is getting axed, leaving millions of acres of forest vulnerable

The Trump administration scrapped a two-decade-old policy that safeguards national forests, a sweeping move that could leave over 58 million acres of land vulnerable to construction and logging.

Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins [this week announced](#) (<https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2025/06/23/secretary-rollins-rescinds-roadless-rule-eliminating-impediment-responsible-forest-management>), plans to rescind the 2001 "Roadless Rule," which aimed to provide lasting protections for roadless areas from multiple-use management, such as logging, construction, and reconstruction.

[Roadless areas](#) ([https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/nfs/files/legacy-media/arp/chap-three-roadless.pdf#:~:text=h%20%22inventoried%20roadless%20area%22%20\(capable%20became%20%22undeveloped%20areas.%20%22\)](https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/nfs/files/legacy-media/arp/chap-three-roadless.pdf#:~:text=h%20%22inventoried%20roadless%20area%22%20(capable%20became%20%22undeveloped%20areas.%20%22))), are considered to be any unpaved, federally owned and managed areas that have been analyzed by the U.S. Forest Service.

The move follows one of President Trump's [executive orders](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/06/2025-02345/unleashing-prosperity-through-deregulation) (<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/06/2025-02345/unleashing-prosperity-through-deregulation>) that focused on eliminating “unnecessary” regulations and barriers he claims hinder American business and innovation.

“Once again, President Trump is removing absurd obstacles to commonsense management of our natural resources by rescinding the overly restrictive roadless rule,” Rollins said at the announcement.

Under the rule, more than 30 percent of the National Forest System is regulated, including land in Utah, Montana, Alaska's Tongass National Forest, and other parts of the West.

Opponents to the decision [said](https://earthjustice.org/press/2025/earthjustice-responds-as-trump-administration-takes-aim-at-longstanding-rule-protecting-national-forestlands) (<https://earthjustice.org/press/2025/earthjustice-responds-as-trump-administration-takes-aim-at-longstanding-rule-protecting-national-forestlands>) these areas provide “abundant opportunities” for outdoor recreation and are essential habitats for wildlife such as grizzly bears, wolves, California condors, and native salmon.

“The Trump administration now wants to throw these forest protections overboard so the timber industry can make huge money from unrestrained logging,” said Drew Caputo, vice president of litigation for lands, wildlife, and oceans at EarthJustice.

Rollins claimed the long-standing law impedes job growth and economic development, estimating that Utah alone suffers a 25 percent decline in economic growth in the forestry sector. She also said strict regulations exacerbate wildfire risks, with over 28 million acres of the protected forests having high or very high risks of fire.

Between 2023 and 2024, the number of reported wildfires grew about 87 percent in the United States, consuming over 8 million acres of land, according to the [National Interagency Coordination Center](https://www.nifc.gov/sites/default/files/NICC/2-Predictive%20Services/Intelligence/Annual%20Reports/2024/annual_report_2024.pdf) (https://www.nifc.gov/sites/default/files/NICC/2-Predictive%20Services/Intelligence/Annual%20Reports/2024/annual_report_2024.pdf). California and other Western states are [increasingly susceptible](https://wfca.com/wildfire-articles/where-do-wildfires-occur/) (<https://wfca.com/wildfire-articles/where-do-wildfires-occur/>) to wildfires in comparison to other parts of the country because of the region's vegetation, with drier pine needles, shrubs, and grasses growing rampant.

"I sincerely thank Secretary Rollins for taking this commonsense step," [said Utah Gov. Spencer Cox](https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2025/06/24/what-they-are-saying-strong-support-secretary-rollins-rescission-roadless-rule-eliminating) (<https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2025/06/24/what-they-are-saying-strong-support-secretary-rollins-rescission-roadless-rule-eliminating>). "It's prevented us from removing dead and dying timber, fueling catastrophic wildfires across our state. Ending this rule is a critical step towards healthier forests and safer communities."

—[Amelia Monroe](/search/?a=Amelia%20Monroe) (</search/?a=Amelia%20Monroe>).

Supreme Court rules states can block Medicaid funding to Planned Parenthood

The Supreme Court ruled Thursday that states can stop Planned Parenthood from receiving funding from Medicaid to perform non-abortion medical care, such as cancer screenings and family planning.

In a [6-3 opinion](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/24pdf/23-1275_e2pg.pdf) (https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/24pdf/23-1275_e2pg.pdf), with the Court's three liberal members in dissent, the conservative majority concluded that patients or health care providers do not have

the right to sue if states deny access to certain medical providers.

The case dates back to 2018, when South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster issued an [executive order](#)

(<https://governor.sc.gov/sites/governor/files/Documents/Executive-Orders/Executive-Order-2018-21.pdf>), removing Planned Parenthood from the state's Medicaid program. McMaster wrote at the time that "the payment of taxpayer funds to abortion clinics, for any purpose, results in the subsidy of abortion and the denial of the right to life."

Planned Parenthood and a patient, Julie Edwards, challenged the order, arguing that it violated a federal provision allowing Medicaid patients to receive care from any provider "qualified to perform the service."

The decision overturns lower courts that had sided with Edwards and Planned Parenthood.

In delivering the majority opinion, Justice Neil Gorsuch stated, "The job of resolving how best to weigh those competing costs and benefits belongs to the people's elected representatives, not unelected judges charged with applying the law as they find it."

The *Medina v. Planned Parenthood South Atlantic* ruling means that those who rely on Medicaid will no longer be able to receive federally funded health care from Planned Parenthood clinics in South Carolina.

"Seven years ago, we took a stand to protect the sanctity of life and defend South Carolina's authority and values—and today, we are finally victorious," McMaster [said in a statement](#)

(<https://governor.sc.gov/news/2025-06/gov-mcmaster-issues-statement-us-supreme-court-victory-medina-v-planned-parenthood>).

Planned Parenthood is the nation's largest abortion provider.

However, its clinics also offer services beyond abortion, such as STD testing, mental health services, and prenatal care.

Federal law has prohibited Medicaid funds to be used for abortion since 1977.

Paige Johnson, the president of the South Atlantic Planned Parenthood clinic, condemned the Court's ruling, [stating](#)

(<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/about-us/newsroom/press-releases/u-s-supreme-court-rules-against-patients-rights-allows-s-c-to-target-planned-parenthood-south-atlantic#:~:text=Statement%20from%20Paige%20Johnson%2C%20President,into%20a%20health%20care%20crisis.>), “Today’s decision is a grave injustice that strikes at the very bedrock of American freedom and promises to send South Carolina deeper into a health care crisis.”

—[Emily Scaff](#) (</search/?a=Emily%20Scaff>).