

News From The States

EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

There are three obvious frontrunners for today's lead story, which is great except that they do not adhere to anything that might be considered a "theme." (Breaking news? Things that made headlines, which is ... literally everything on our website? You can see how I landed here.) Still, it's what you need to know today, so I'm going to talk about all three and figure the rest out later.

(Addendum: Turns out this is pretty much what I do every other day, so it was fine. Thank you for your continued subscription to the chaos.)



The Big Takeaway

Local, state and federal law enforcement agencies conducted a massive manhunt Thursday in Maine, sweeping the central swath of the state in search of a gunman believed to have killed 18 people and injured at least 13 others in a pair of shootings — one in a bowling alley, the other at a bar — in the southwestern city of Lewiston Wednesday night, [the Maine Morning Star reported](#).

"I know that the people of Lewiston are enduring immeasurable pain," Gov. Janet Mills, a Democrat, said at a press conference Thursday morning. "I wish I could take that pain from you, but I promise you this, we will all help you carry this grief ... This is a dark day for Maine."



*Another dark day in America.
(Photo by Douglas Sacha/Getty Images)*

Police locked down multiple college campuses and towns, urging residents to shelter in place as investigators combed the state for Robert Card, a 40-year-old resident of Bowdoin. Authorities said Thursday they had issued an arrest warrant for eight counts of murder against Card, who was last seen wearing a brown hooded sweatshirt and carrying a military-style assault rifle, according to [a photo posted online](#) by the Lewiston Police Department.

Each of the eight counts represents a victim who has been identified, according to Col. William G. Ross of the Maine State Police. The final count will likely reach 18, in conjunction with the total number of people killed Wednesday night. Seven (six males, one female) died at the Just-In-Time bowling alley, an additional eight (all male) were murdered at Schemengees Bar & Grille, and three others died at local hospitals, [Ross said](#).

Where this mass shooting falls on America's annual tally of mass shootings depends on your interpretation of the term. Under the New York Times [definition](#), this is the [eighth](#) mass shooting in the United States this year. According to the [Mass Shooting Tracker](#), it's the [643th](#). (Odds are there will have been a 644th by the time you click that link.) But at some point, the semantics become meaningless. Multiple Americans have been killed by guns multiple times in America this year, and that is the only metric that matters.

No one is really safe from gun violence in this country, but the risk is higher in states with weak gun laws. Maine ranks [25th nationally](#) for the strength of its

policies, which do not ban high-capacity magazines, confiscate weapons from domestic abusers under restraining orders or [require permits or training](#) to carry a concealed weapon. The state also does not have a so-called [red flag law](#), which would allow the court system to temporarily confiscate firearms from a person in crisis. [According to law enforcement](#), Card had recently reported mental health issues, including hearing voices, and had made shooting threats at the National Guard base in Saco.



Bare shelves at the gun store after a spate of mass shootings in 2021, because people are (for some reason) always afraid that Congress will enact stricter gun laws after a mass shooting makes it clear that our gun laws are a joke.

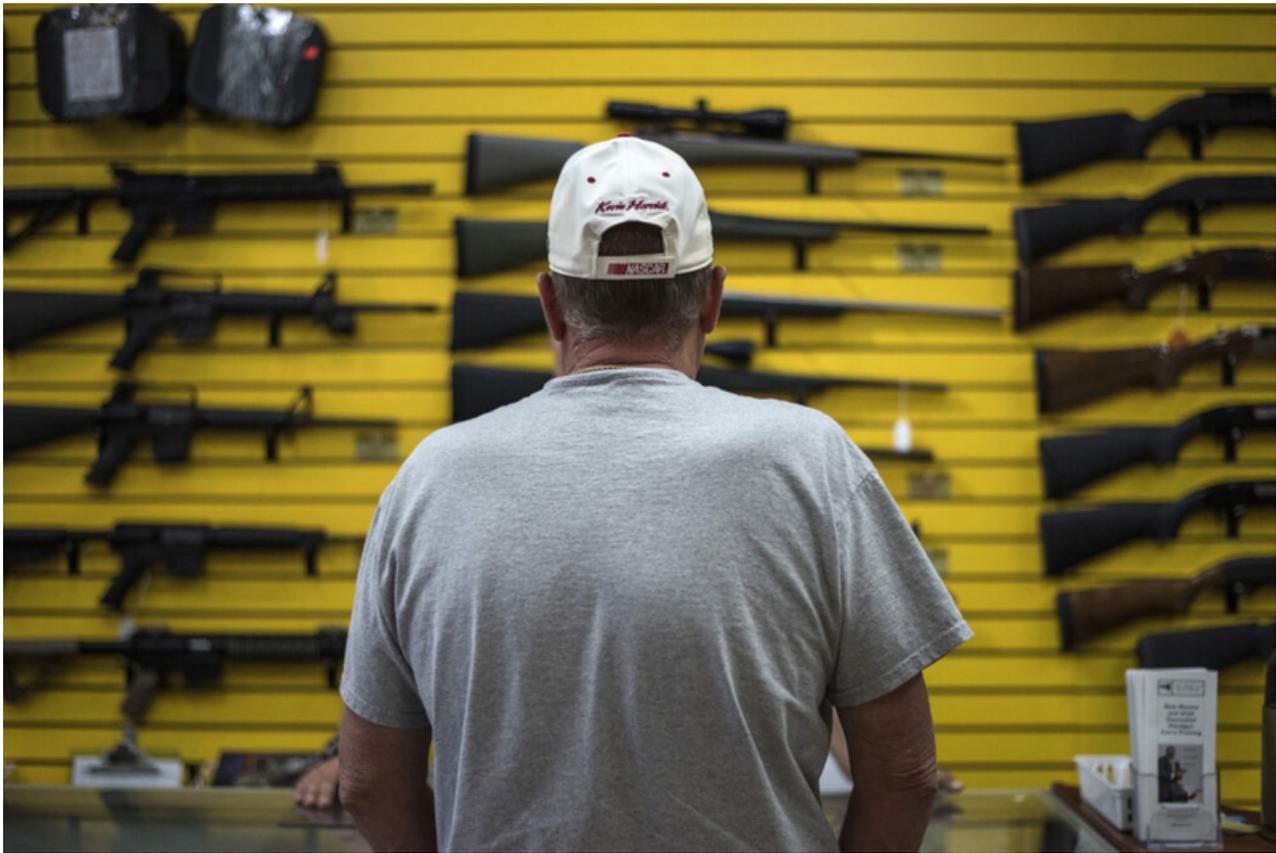
(Photo by Spencer Platt/Getty Images)

Earlier this year, state lawmakers considered a handful of proposals addressing those issues, including [a bill](#) that would have instituted a 72-hour waiting period and a criminal background check for most gun purchases and another that would have banned rapid-fire modification devices. [All of them failed](#).

Still, officials said they were blindsided by the shooting, mostly because this type of thing just ... isn't supposed to happen in Maine. Statewide, there were just 29 homicides last year. It's "a safe state," Auburn Mayor Jason Levesque told NBC News. "This is something unusual. This is not something we expect in Maine."

"It is just so hard to believe such a heinous attack could occur in our state," [concurred](#) U.S. Sen. Susan Collins, the most [perpetually surprised](#) Republican in Congress.

But it shouldn't be hard to believe. In a country with virtually no gun control and [more guns than people](#), mass shootings are an inevitability that can occur anytime and anywhere. The only way to fix it is to address the problem, which is the guns, or more specifically the availability of the guns. You know this. I know this. Lawmakers know this, too – all of them, even the ones (Republicans) that pretend they don't.



*Even this guy probably knows it.
(Photo by Sergio Flores/Bloomberg, Getty Images)*

Democrats did what they could do to highlight that fact Thursday, [calling for legislative action](#) to curb mass shootings in the wake of a mass shooting that rocked a peaceful place where mass shootings *just aren't supposed to happen*.

“I don't feel it is too soon to say that I hope people now realize that Maine is not a magical place that is immune to our nation's gun violence epidemic,” said state Rep. Dan Ankeles. “We can't just be complacent about this, we have to do something. And I feel like 186 of us [lawmakers] have some serious voting to do in the coming weeks.”

After pledging federal support to the state, President Joe Biden made his own pitch, once again begging Congress to ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines like the ones Card is suspected of using. [In a statement](#), Biden reminded a weary nation that this — mentally clocking the exits in every public place; being silently terrified to send your children to school; knowing that this mass shooting will not be the last mass shooting because [half](#) of our [elected leaders](#) don't seem to care about the first two things — is not, actually, normal.

“We cannot accept it,” he said. “I urge Republican lawmakers in Congress to fulfill their duty to protect the American people. Work with us to pass a bill banning assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, to enact universal background checks, to require safe storage of guns, and end immunity from liability for gun manufacturers. This is the very least we owe every American who will now bear the scars — physical and mental — of this latest attack.”



Meanwhile, in Michigan.
(Photo by Anna Liz Nichols/Michigan Advance)

There is no great segue from this, other than to say that our next story is in Michigan, where the United Auto Workers announced that it had reached a potential deal with Ford Motor Co., renewing hope that a 41-day strike against the [Big Three automakers](#) might be nearing its conclusion. The tentative agreement includes a 25% wage increase over 4.5 years, beginning with an initial pay hike of 11%, [the Michigan Advance reported](#).

“The gains in the deal are valued at more than four times the gains from the 2019 contract,” the union said [in a statement](#).

UAW members must ratify the deal for it to become final. The union told striking Ford workers to return to their jobs during that process, which could allow production to resume this week. The group is still striking against General Motors and Stellantis (which includes Dodge and Chrysler), but the Ford deal could serve as a blueprint to settle those contracts.

The strike [began](#) on Sept. 15 with a walkout at three assembly plants in

Michigan, Missouri and Ohio. It has since grown to include eight assembly plants and 38 parts distribution centers in 22 states. The latest picket site — [GM's Arlington Assembly](#) plant in Texas, which joined the walkout Tuesday — brought the total number of UAW members on strike at the Big Three automakers to more than 45,000.



*President Joe Biden addresses UAW members walking a picket line at the GM Willow Run Distribution Center on Sept. 26, 2023, in Belleville, Michigan.
(Official White House Photo by Adam Schultz)*

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer congratulated Ford and the UAW for reaching a “historic deal” that benefits both the company and its workers.

“There is a lot riding on these negotiations,” Whitmer, a Democrat, said in a statement. “We are in a fierce competition with the rest of the world for the future of manufacturing — and all eyes are on Michigan. We can be the example to the rest of the nation on how to bring jobs back home from overseas and keep making stuff here in Michigan.”

Before we close this out, let me offer you some more information about House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican that basically no one had ever heard of before he [ascended to leadership](#) Wednesday. He was not even particularly well known in his home state, where he ran unopposed in 2015 to serve a partial term in the state legislature before departing for Congress a year later, [per the Louisiana Illuminator](#).

Before that, he’d been an attorney who worked primarily to advance [right-wing](#)

causes, including restrictions on abortion, expanded religious rights for Christians, continued tax incentives for a replica of Noah's ark (...I feel the need to say that this is not a joke), and various efforts to whittle away at LGBTQ+ rights. Career highlights include twice defending Louisiana's same-sex marriage ban before the Supreme Court, organizing a "life march" in his district and launching his own legal firm, Freedom Guard, which claimed to "defend religious liberty, the sanctity of human life, marriage the the family."



*House Speaker Mike Johnson and some people who maybe knew who he was before Wednesday.
(Photo by Win McNamee/Getty Images)*

In his first year in the Louisiana legislature, Johnson authored the "Marriage and Conscience Act," which aimed to protect anyone who opposed same-sex marriage for religious reasons. (It failed to advance out of committee.) A year later, he attacked same-sex marriage from a different angle, proposing a bill called the "Pastor Protection Act" to shield church leaders from any practice that went against their religious beliefs. (That one passed the House but died in the Senate.)

But he did get a win that same year, when lawmakers gave near-unanimous approval to a proposal banning "dismemberment abortion." This, apparently, is how extreme right-wing politicians refer to dilation and curettage, in which a medical provider dilates a pregnant person's cervix and uses suction or surgical instruments to remove the fetus. It's a safe and common procedure that is usually performed during the second trimester; it's also a frequent part of miscarriage care — and is, like all reproductive care, exactly none of your business if you are not the patient undergoing it.

Take heart, though — even if you don't agree with his extreme right-wing politics, Johnson is, like, a super nice guy, according to his fellow lawmakers. A state Republican whose legislative district falls within Johnson's congressional boundaries said he's "extremely nice" and "not confrontational" and also "very respectful," even when he disagrees with you about your right to marry who you love or make decisions about your own pregnancy! An anti-abortion state Democrat concurred, saying that Johnson "knew how to disagree without being disagreeable."

Even the guy who lost the 2016 congressional race to Johnson was happy to sing his praises! Shreveport lawyer Marshall Jones, a Democrat, is "thrilled" that Johnson is the new speaker, because he knows Johnson "to be a good person, and a good man, and a good listener." Jones is not even concerned that Johnson sought to overturn the 2020 election — that's just a "different interpretation of what the Constitution allows you to do," which Johnson can just leave behind now that he has this "clean slate" as speaker.

"He's going to have to step up and try to get along with everybody," Jones said. "He's got the basic ability to do that. But how much influence being a vocal supporter of former President Trump is, is going to be a big conflict. I'm hoping that he'll be able to handle it because right now, the House is frozen. Everybody wants Mike to succeed, they really do."

Probably not everybody: [Alabama state commission to study school safety ...](#) [In reversal, Colorado's Ken Buck backs new House Speaker Mike Johnson despite election denial ...](#) [Florida Dems blast GOP selection of Louisiana's Mike Johnson as next U.S. House Speaker ...](#) [Kansas congressional delegation follows partisan script on vote for new U.S. House speaker ...](#) [Who is Mike Johnson? New U.S. House speaker belongs to GOP's religious conservative wing ...](#) [Michigan gun owners call for passage of bills preventing domestic abusers from owning firearms ...](#) [U.S. Rep. Don Bacon \(R-Neb.\) backs consensus GOP pick Johnson for House speaker ...](#) [Texas Republicans unite to elect Mike Johnson as U.S. House Speaker ...](#) [New Jersey asks federal appeals court to uphold new gun restrictions ...](#) [Ohio bill allowing guns in some government buildings may have significant loophole ...](#) [Washington senator arrested at Hong Kong airport for carrying handgun](#)



State of Our Democracy

Louisiana Gov.-elect Jeff Landry, a Republican, would like you to know that he is going to do things a little *differently* than his predecessors, and that the era of change starts *right now*, with his transition team, which will set up shop at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and *not* at LSU in Baton Rouge. It is a strategic and symbolic choice of venue that is meant to *send a message*, Landry said. Or maybe even *several* messages, [per the Louisiana Illuminator](#).



THE JOY OF MESSAGING
(Photo by Travis Gauthier for Louisiana Illuminator)

Message one: Landry will *not* be catering to political insiders in Baton Rouge.

“I’ve said from day one that this administration will ensure that every part of this state has a voice, not just those who occupy the capital,” he said.

Message two: The location gives *everyone* — even people in Baton Rouge, probably! — “access” to the team.

“It makes it easy for everyone around the state to reach us,” said Landry. (Does he know that most college campuses have internet and telephones and cell service, making it easy to reach a team of people based at any one of them? IDK. This was not a sanctioned transition message — though if it were, it could have been sent, easily, in many formats, to a person on any college campus.)

Message three: Every university matters!

“We want the people of Louisiana to know that all of our universities are important to us,” he said.

Message four (not mentioned): UL-Lafayette is Landry’s alma mater. Message five (also not mentioned): The campus is just 15 minutes from his house. Message six: Lots of messages to be gleaned from in between the lines of the actual messages, I think. (Message seven: Hard to end a paragraph in this format.)

The transition team's main goal will be nailing down “a clear set of recommendations and policies to tackle the challenges we have coming,” Landry said. This, according to alumni of previous transition teams, is just a slightly different way of describing the goal of every transition team in history: Assembling a team of people to run the government you are now leading.

“Essentially, you have to set up a government,” said Matthew Block, who helped current Gov. John Bel Edwards take over from Bobby Jindal in 2016.

Like every governor in history, Landry will need to appoint cabinet members and fill hundreds of jobs, board seats and vacancies on various commissions. That process will be directed by his chief political advisor, who will oversee a crew of seven co-chairs, including two men who ran for governor in 2019, one longtime state official, a Lafayette businessman, two wealthy GOP BFFs/megadonors, and the governor-elect's wife, Sharon.

Sharon is the only woman on the team. Her main job, according to Landry, will be keeping the rest of the group “in line.” Sharon seemed fine with this.

“We're a team,” she said. (The Landries? The actual team? Both? Neither? IDK. Not a sanctioned transition message.)



*One of several teams.
(Photo by Piper Hutchinson/Louisiana Illuminator)*

Landry said he would direct the team to maintain an “unwavering” focus on “crime, education and the economy.” That slim agenda ignores a host of other

problems plaguing the state, including crises in foster care and child welfare programs, an ongoing effort to cull Medicaid rolls and a projected budget shortfall. But it doesn't really matter, according to Terry Ryder, who co-directed a gubernatorial transition in 1996. Because governors don't actually have much of a say in where they direct their attention.

"You can decide to focus on whatever you want, but life will give you other stuff," he said.

Landry might be prepared for that if his transition team included more people with experience — or even just more *people*. Edwards began his transition with six co-chairs but ended up with more than 200 people spread across eight committees, each focused on a different policy area. Jindal's transition team had at least 10 of those panels, some of which [held public hearings](#) across the state (even though they were based at LSU). Seven people is not big — or diverse — enough, Ryder said.

"He needs to have people who have knowledge and experience of what they're doing," Ryder said. "Some [of the people Landry has to hire] will be working in areas he knows little about."

Well, it is different: [Arkansas governor sued over alleged violations of public records law](#) ... [Should Bridgeport, Conn. hold a new primary election? Attorneys close arguments](#) ... [Federal judge strikes down Georgia's political maps, sending lawmakers back to the drawing board](#) ... [Idaho's Ada County Republican Central Committee elects new officers after former group resigned](#) ... [Democrat Beshear continues to far outpace Cameron in race for Kentucky governor](#) ... [How Pine Tree Power is banking on one-on-one conversations to drive support for Question 3 in Maine](#) ... [Minnesota borrows \\$454 million to upgrade State Office Building](#) ... [Bill Waller's 2019 campaign is still haunting Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves](#) ... [Missouri House Speaker Dean Plocher dismisses calls for his resignation](#) ... [Montana GOP, Republican National Committee seek to intervene in voter registration suit](#) ... [Local agency's request to borrow money leads to spat between New Jersey gubernatorial hopeful, GOP leaders](#) ... [As North Carolina Democrats denounce new GOP-drawn election districts, one congresswoman called them "explicit political pornography"](#) ... [Pennsylvania voters' personal info was not shared with election research group, state officials say](#) ... [First CD1 poll shows independent voters have power to influence Rhode Island election](#) ... [In November runoffs, Knoxville, Tenn. voters have three competitive races](#)



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One Last Thing

Like all of us, Rob Gronkowski is [very tired](#) of hearing about Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce.



*Today's a little heavy, so here's Gronk and some slime.
(via [Giphy](#))*

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