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USA OUTLOOK

WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

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Photo: NY TIMES

US says it has returned to Venezuela all \$500 million of initial oil sale

The United States has returned the full **\$500 million** generated from an initial Venezuelan oil sale to the Venezuelan government, completing the transfer with a final **\$200 million payment**. The oil sale was part of a deal reached between Washington and Caracas last month, following the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in a U.S. military operation on January 3.

U.S. officials stated that the funds are intended to be used **for the benefit of the Venezuelan people**, with the U.S. government overseeing how the money is disbursed. Secretary of State Marco Rubio described the arrangement as a **short-term stabilization effort**, allowing Venezuela to use its oil revenue to maintain basic government functions such as paying teachers, firefighters, and police officers, and to prevent a broader institutional collapse.

The proceeds had been temporarily held in **Qatar** to ensure Venezuela could access funds needed to operate. Looking ahead, U.S. officials said future oil-sale revenues are expected to be placed into a **U.S.-based fund**, from which expenditures would be authorized under agreed procedures for Venezuelan government obligations.

Source: <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/us-has-returned-remaining-200-million-initial-500-million-oil-sale-venezuela-us-2026-02-04/>

Trump signs spending bill that ends four-day government shutdown

U.S. President Donald Trump signed a spending bill into law on February 3, ending a **four-day partial government shutdown** that began after Congress failed to pass funding legislation before a Saturday deadline. The bill restores funding for key federal agencies, including defense, healthcare, labor, education, and housing, and temporarily extends funding for the Department of Homeland Security until **February 13**.

The agreement gives lawmakers additional time to negotiate contentious issues, particularly **potential limits on Trump's immigration enforcement policies**. Democrats pushed for new constraints following the killing of two U.S. citizens by federal agents in Minneapolis last month. As a partial concession, the administration has begun deploying **body cameras for immigration agents in Minnesota**, though other Democratic demands remain unresolved.

The spending deal passed the Senate with broad bipartisan support and narrowly cleared the House by a **217–214 vote**. While the shutdown caused limited disruption, lawmakers were eager to avoid a prolonged repeat of the previous shutdown, which lasted **43 days** and cost the U.S. economy an estimated **\$11 billion**.



Photo: NYTIMES

Source: <https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/trump-backed-deal-end-shutdown-faces-tight-house-vote-2026-02-03/>



Photo: NY TIMES

Pentagon says it will cut academic ties with Harvard University

The U.S. Department of Defense announced it will **end academic and professional ties with Harvard University**, marking a further escalation in tensions between the Trump administration and the institution. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said the Pentagon will discontinue all **graduate-level Professional Military Education programs, fellowships, and certificate programs** involving Harvard beginning in the **2026–2027 academic year**. Service members already enrolled will be allowed to complete their studies.

The move is part of a broader crackdown by the Trump administration on elite U.S. universities, particularly Harvard, over issues including **pro-Palestinian protests, diversity initiatives, transgender policies, and climate programs**. President Trump has been especially critical of Harvard, accusing it of fostering what officials describe as anti-American and antisemitic activism.

Harvard has pushed back against the administration's actions, previously suing over attempts to freeze federal funding and emphasizing its long-standing relationship with the U.S. military. The university has also stated that it condemns discrimination and has acknowledged findings that both Jewish and Muslim students faced bigotry following the start of the Gaza war.



Source:

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/pentagon-ends-training-fellowships-certificate-programs-with-harvard-hegseth-2026-02-06/>

F.D.A. Relaxes Rules on 'Naturally Derived' Dyes

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced it will relax enforcement of rules governing food color additives, allowing manufacturers to label products as having “no artificial colors” as long as they do not use petroleum-based dyes. Previously, products could not make that claim if they contained any added dyes at all.

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and FDA Commissioner Dr. Martin Makary said the change is intended to encourage food companies to shift from synthetic, petroleum-based dyes to naturally derived alternatives. As part of this effort, the FDA approved beetroot red as a new food dye and expanded the permitted use of spirulina extract, bringing the total number of newly authorized natural dyes to six since the current administration took office.

The policy shift is part of Mr. Kennedy's broader initiative to reshape the American diet, which also includes efforts to reduce ultraprocessed foods and revise federal dietary guidelines to emphasize protein over carbohydrates. While health advocates have long raised concerns about synthetic dyes, citing possible links to behavioral issues in children, the food industry maintains that approved additives are safe, and some experts question whether natural dyes are necessarily safer.

Rather than mandating changes through regulation or legislation, Mr. Kennedy has relied on voluntary cooperation from food manufacturers. Several large companies, such as Nestlé and Conagra, have agreed to remove petroleum-based dyes by 2026, though candy manufacturers have been more resistant.



Photo: NYTIMES



Source:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/05/us/politics/kennedy-fda-food-dyes-protein.html>



Photo: NYTIMES

Stocks Rebound After Volatile Week as Dow Hits Record High

The U.S. stock market rebounded strongly on Friday after a volatile week, with major indexes posting their biggest daily gains since May. The Dow Jones Industrial Average reached a historic milestone by surpassing 50,000 points for the first time, closing at 50,115 and rising 2.5% on the day.

The S&P 500 gained 2%, led by large technology stocks such as Nvidia and Broadcom, while industrial, energy, and financial stocks also advanced. This reflected a continued shift by investors toward more traditional, economically sensitive companies after concerns grew over high valuations and rapid growth expectations in artificial intelligence-related stocks.

Industrial and financial companies performed particularly well, with Caterpillar rising 7% on Friday and up 25% for the year, and major banks like Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan gaining around 4%.

Despite the strong finish, the S&P 500 ended the week slightly lower, marking its fourth down week out of six in 2026 so far, though it remains up 1.3% for the year. Analysts noted that the Dow crossing 50,000 represents an important psychological milestone for investors.

Source:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/06/business/stock-market-rebound-dow-50000.html>