

WEEKLY CURRENT

October 6-10, 2025

Issues Making a Splash This Week

Two Roads Diverged in a Yellow Wood: President Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping are taking two different approaches in the run-up to their expected meeting later this month, with Trump looking to avoid provocation, while Xi is taking steps to underscore Beijing's points of leverage. [Read more here.](#)

An Early Retirement: Both the Department of Labor and the Securities and Exchange Commission are in the implementation phase of the Trump administration's effort to expand access to alternative investments as part of retirement plans such as 401(K)s. [Read more here.](#)

Bellwethers and Whistles: Virginia and New Jersey are holding gubernatorial elections this year, the highest-profile races before next year's midterms. [Read more here.](#)

TRUMP AND XI READY FOR SUMMIT: With the expected meeting between President Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation leaders' summit less than a month away, all actions of the two countries that could be viewed as targeting the other are being seen through this lens. **However, the two leaders appear to be taking distinctly different approaches, with the US seeking to avoid aggressive actions and maintain the current tenuous truce, while China is laying the groundwork for potential future sources of leverage in case the relationship deteriorates.** This should not be misconstrued as meaning that the Trump administration would not consider targeted action if there were backsliding in the relationship. Instead, it highlights the different signals each country is sending.

The most recent example of China's efforts to prepare these sources of leverage was its announcement yesterday of an [increase in export control license requirements](#) for rare earth minerals. Still, **the impact of these limits will only become clear after December 1st, when the restrictions take effect. The rules themselves do not ban the sale of any of the covered metals. Instead, they will create a licensing regime that opens the door for China to exercise control over the industry in the future by approving or disapproving these licenses.**

As much as this is a potential tool in the economic war between the US and China, announcing these new requirements ahead of Trump and Xi's meeting is a way to underscore the leverage that Beijing holds in these discussions. While the US may be dominant in specific advanced technology sectors, these goods rely on critical minerals, many of which are mined and processed in China, putting it in a position to exercise considerable leverage, if it chooses to.

Given the Trump administration's approach to minimizing actions that could jeopardize the meeting between the two leaders, it is unlikely that there will be any rush to react in a manner that could be deemed provocative. Instead, it is more likely that the White House will opt to wait and see how the licensing process unfolds before determining whether any additional steps are necessary to ratchet up pressure on China. A similar cycle occurred [earlier this spring](#) when Beijing was withholding exports of critical minerals, which led to the US limiting sales of airplane components and certain semiconductor technologies to China. This is unlikely to be the only time such an escalatory cycle occurs during the Trump administration, with another possible instance likely to happen later this year when these new limits take effect. **Any US response will more likely rely on export controls rather than new tariffs, putting the business community on the frontline of this conflict and posing potential disruptions, even if such a renewed spat is relatively short.**

During the current truce, there have been few reports on policies the US is considering enacting to target China, with arguably the most consequential being the news [that a draft executive order](#) (EO) would impose limits on pharmaceuticals from China, with a particular focus on Chinese-invested experimental treatments. However, when asked about the potential action, the White House responded by stating that Trump was not “actively considering” the EO. This could be interpreted to mean that it may consider the EO in the future, but it is also unclear whether the Trump administration has solidified these plans if it were to pursue them. The action would likely garner bipartisan support in Congress, with lawmakers having increased calls in recent years to reduce reliance on China for pharmaceutical products. However, the EO may be seen as a step too far for the current state of US-China relations, with it being a relatively aggressive measure that would be more difficult to unwind than other export controls, meaning it may not be likely to be part of an escalatory cycle tied to new Chinese export controls, but may be employed if there is a greater sense that the relationship is materially worsening.

EXPANDING ACCESS TO PRIVATE MARKETS: In August, private funds notched a win with President Trump's signing of the “Democratizing Access To Alternative Assets For 401(K) Investors” executive [order](#), a measure that laid out a pathway to reduce the regulatory barriers to the offering of alternative assets in defined contribution plans. Per the order, “It is the policy of the United States that every American preparing for retirement should have access to funds that include investments in alternative assets” where appropriate, going on to define alternative

assets as private market investments, real estate interests, investment vehicles invested in digital assets, investments in commodities, and more.

From a regulatory standpoint, the focus of the effort to open up retirement accounts to alternative investments lies with the Department of Labor (DOL). **Trump's executive order gave the DOL 180 days, or until early February 2026, to promulgate regulations clarifying a fiduciary's duty to plan participants when offering access to alternative investment vehicles as part of a defined contribution plan.** DOL is also charged with updating any necessary guidance as to a fiduciary's duties under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA), something it's already begun with the [withdrawal](#) of Biden-era guidance in August and the issuance of a new advisory [opinion](#) on lifetime income investment options in September.

Although it has yet to do so, DOL stated in a late September press [release](#) that "the department intends to issue a notice of proposed rulemaking that clarifies the duties that a fiduciary owes to plan participants under ERISA when deciding whether to make available to plan participants an asset allocation fund that includes investments in alternative assets, including potential safe harbors." A rule that includes a safe harbor for plan administrators offering alternative asset investments could have a much more meaningful impact on sponsors' willingness to expand their offerings than prior attempts to achieve the same goal under Trump 1.0. Back in 2020, DOL published [guidance](#) clarifying that plan sponsors could offer "private equity investments within professionally managed asset allocation funds" so long as they did so after conducting an objective analysis of the risks posed by the offerings, but the measure didn't dramatically alter the playing field due to continued fear of litigation among plan administrators.

While DOL is the primary regulator of defined contribution plan administration, the expansion of offerings to include alternative asset funds necessarily implicates the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Trump's executive order acknowledges as much, directing the SEC to consult with DOL on ways to facilitate access to such alternative investments in 401(K)s and the like. **At an industry event earlier this week, SEC Chair Paul Atkins [said](#) the agency could soon hold a roundtable discussion to solicit feedback on the issue.** Atkins has repeatedly argued that the lack of access to alternative investments in defined contribution plans can create imbalances in investor portfolios, but he's also been [clear](#) that a first step in expanding access to retail investors is to establish clear guardrails for such investments. **Beyond changes to disclosure requirements, a separate change [industry](#) hopes the SEC will pursue is to provide an update to Investment Company Act regulations that determine whether the plan or the individual choosing the plan qualifies as an investor with respect to the investment limit the law places on alternative investment vehicles.** Relaxing the regulations such that each plan only counts as one investor, not each of the

investors in the plan, could dramatically expand access to such vehicles.

WHAT CAN VA & NJ IN 2025 TELL US ABOUT 2026? The 2026 midterm elections that will determine control of Congress for the second two years of President Trump's term are over a year away but gubernatorial races next month in two states could serve as early bellwethers. **New Jersey and Virginia are the only states that elect their governor in off-year elections held the year following the presidential contest and these races may serve as an indicator of voters' feelings a year after Trump's comeback victory.**

In Virginia, former Rep. Abigail Spanberger (D-VA) is facing off against Lt. Governor Winsome Earle-Sears (R-VA). The Old Dominion's gubernatorial race has long been seen as a bellwether and as with the first midterms of a president's term, historical trends favor the candidate whose party does not control the White House. Since the late 1970s, only once has a Virginia governor of the same party as the president won office: former Governor Terry McAuliffe (D-VA) in 2013. His opponent, Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli (R-VA), was seen as too conservative. **Polling suggests that this year's race is not as competitive as last cycle's, which Governor Glenn Youngkin (R-VA) won by less than two percentage points.** The most recent [RealClearPolitics polling average](#) has Spanberger ahead by 8.6 points. The relative strength of the candidates may factor into this dynamic. A July Politico article [described](#) frustration among Republicans over the way Earle-Sears has run her campaign and that month, she [reshuffled her](#) campaign staff, which is usually not a good sign for a candidate. Earle-Sears' fundraising has fallen far short of Spanberger's. As of last month, her campaign had \$4.9 million remaining in cash, [compared](#) to \$12.2 million for her Democratic opponent, according to The Washington Post.

There are some wildcards in the Virginia race, though. This year's DOGE cuts and the ongoing federal government shutdown could create headwinds for Earle-Sears in Virginia, where many federal employees live. Recent [reporting](#) on violent texts sent by the Democratic nominee for attorney general, former state Delegate Jay Jones (D-VA), could drag down others on the Democratic ticket. **It's also an open question whether education and transgender rights, issues that Youngkin and Trump seized upon in their winning campaigns in 2021 and 2024, respectively, will continue to resonate with voters this year.** Earle-Sears has [emphasized](#) policies relating to transgender students in her campaign. Two Northern Virginia school systems have [sued](#) the Trump administration in a clash over federal education funding and their transgender policies. If Earle-Sears overperforms her polling, that could convince Republicans that a focus on the culture wars may be winning campaign messaging for the midterms.

New Jersey, though theoretically a bluer state than Virginia, may be a more instructive bellwether for 2026. The gubernatorial race is tighter in the Garden State than in the Old Dominion. According to the most recent RealClearPolitics

polling average, the Democratic candidate, Rep. Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ), [leads](#) her Republican opponent, former state Rep. Jack Ciattarelli (R-NJ), by only 3.3 points and the margins of error of the polls included in that average range from 3.0 to 3.3 points. The state shifted rightward both in the last gubernatorial race in 2021 and in last year's presidential race. Similar to Virginia, New Jersey has elected governors of the opposite party of the president for decades, with an exception in 2021. This week's debate [showcased](#) the bitter tenor of the election and the recent [release](#) of Sherrill's military records has scrambled the race. While Trump has not offered Earle-Sears an endorsement (and notably [declined](#) to mention her in remarks at a Navy event in Virginia last week), he [endorsed](#) Ciattarelli in New Jersey's GOP gubernatorial primary this spring. **This endorsement could tie Ciattarelli more closely to the president than Earle-Sears in the eyes of voters, which could potentially make the New Jersey race more of a referendum on the president than Virginia's contest.** While the shutdown is likely to be a bigger issue in Virginia than New Jersey, it could also factor into the Garden State's race. The Trump administration [announced](#) last week the freeze of \$18 billion in funding for a new rail tunnel under the Hudson River that would connect New Jersey with New York City.

The race has implications for the future of the Democratic Party, locked out of power on the federal level after Republicans' wins in 2024. The Washington Post [reported](#) this week that the Democratic National Committee will hold off on releasing its 2024 autopsy until after the November elections. Spanberger and Sherrill come from similar backgrounds: they're both moderates with national security experience first elected to the House in the 2018 Democratic wave of Trump's first term. As the Democratic Party searches for an identity post-2024, a Spanberger or Sherrill win could boost those calling for ideological moderation. On the other hand, the party's left flank could cite a loss as justification for moving the party in a more progressive direction.

A Quick Look Back

House

This week, the House was not in session.

Senate

On Monday, the Senate resumed consideration of the FY26 National Defense Authorization Act. The chamber held unsuccessful procedural votes on the respective GOP and Democratic-led stopgap funding measures. The chamber held a successful procedural vote on the en bloc consideration of 107 executive branch nominations.

On Tuesday, the Senate voted to confirm the 107 nominations en bloc and held a successful procedural vote on a joint resolution disapproving a 2024 Bureau of Land

Management (BLM) rule designating 3.6 million acres in the Central Yukon planning area as areas of "critical environmental concern."

On Wednesday, the Senate passed the joint resolution disapproving the 2024 BLM Central Yukon planning area rule. The chamber held unsuccessful procedural votes on the respective GOP and Democratic-led stopgap funding measures. The Senate also held a successful procedural vote on the nomination of Jennifer Lee Mascott to be a judge on the Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit. The chamber then passed a joint resolution disapproving a 2025 BLM rule that protected a 4 million acre area of North Dakota from oil and gas development. The Senate also held a failed vote on a measure to end President Trump's national energy emergency declaration. The chamber then held a failed procedural vote on a joint resolution to remove the US armed forces from hostilities that have not been authorized by Congress.

On Thursday, the Senate held unsuccessful procedural votes on the respective GOP and Democratic-led stopgap funding measures. The chamber also passed the FY26 National Defense Authorization Act.

Today, the Senate will not be in session today.

White House

On Monday, President Trump did not have any public events scheduled.

On Tuesday, President Trump held a bilateral meeting and had lunch with Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney. The president also met with American-Israeli former hostage Edan Alexander.

On Wednesday, President Trump received an intelligence briefing and participated in a roundtable on ANTIFA.

On Thursday, President Trump hosted a Cabinet meeting and held a bilateral meeting with Finnish President Alexander Stubb.

Today, President Trump will depart the White House at 10:00 a.m. en route to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center for his semi-annual physical. At 5:00 p.m., the president will make an announcement at the White House.

Spotlight Review

Tuesday: [Key Cases for Investors to Watch in SCOTUS' 2025-26 Term](#)

Thursday: [The Policy and Politics of Data Centers](#)

On the Horizon

Macroeconomic

Today at 9:45 a.m., Chicago Federal Reserve Bank President Austan Goolsbee will give opening remarks and moderate a discussion before the 19th annual Community Bankers Symposium, "Community Banking: Charting the Course," hosted by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago.

On Monday at 12:10 p.m., Philadelphia Federal Reserve Bank President Anna Paulson will speak on "A View from the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia" before the National Association for Business Economics 67th Annual Meeting, titled "Global Economy in Transition: Finding Opportunity Amid Disruption".

On Tuesday at 3:30 p.m., Boston Federal Reserve Bank President Susan Collins will speak before the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce.

Defense

Today at 10:00 a.m., the National Institute for Deterrence Studies will hold a virtual seminar titled "modernization efforts shaping the future of America's nuclear deterrent." [More information here.](#)

Today at 1:00 p.m., the Center for Strategic and International Studies will hold a virtual discussion titled "Should the United States Extend New START Limits?" [More information here.](#)

On Tuesday at 9:30 a.m., the Federalist Society for Law and Public Policy Studies will hold its AI and National Security Symposium. [More information here.](#)

On Wednesday at 10:00 a.m., the Hudson Institute will hold a conference titled "Vanguard of Manufacturing: Fortifying US National Security." [More information here.](#)

On Thursday at 2:00 p.m., the Institute for Critical Infrastructure Technology will hold a virtual briefing titled "Securing America's Infrastructure From Foreign-Controlled Sensor Technology." [More information here.](#) Expected participants include:

- Rep. Dusty Johnson (R-SD)

Education

On Tuesday at 3:00 p.m., the Brookings Institution's Center for Economic Security and Opportunity will hold a virtual discussion titled "How much is too much? Loan limits in the federal student loan program." [More information here.](#)

Energy, Environment, and Natural Resources

On Thursday at 12:00 p.m., New America will hold a virtual discussion titled "Power Switch: Power, People, and the Energy Transition." [More information here.](#)

Financial Services

From Wednesday through Thursday, the Fintech Foundation will hold its DC Fintech Week 2025. [More information here.](#) Expected participants include:

- Travis Hill, acting chairman, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
- Christopher Waller, member, Federal Reserve Board of Governors
- Paul Atkins, chairman, Securities and Exchange Commission

On Wednesday at 11:00 a.m., the Cato Institute will hold a forum titled "Fifty-Five years of the Bank Secrecy Act." [More information here.](#)

On Thursday at 10:00 a.m., the House Financial Services Committee Subcommittee on National Security, Illicit Finance, and International Financial Institutions will hold a hearing titled "Evaluating the Operations of the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS)." [More information here.](#)

On Thursday at 2:00 p.m., the House Financial Services Committee Task Force on Monetary Policy, Treasury Market Resilience, and Economic Prosperity will hold a hearing titled "Examining Primary Dealers and Balance Sheet Constraints." [More information here.](#)

Geopolitical

Today at 9:30 a.m., the Washington Institute for Near East Policy will hold a virtual forum titled "The Gaza 'First Phase' Agreement: Assessment and Implications." [More information here.](#)

Today at 9:45 a.m., Georgetown University's Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding and the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies will hold a conference titled "Palestine at a Historical Juncture: Perspectives on New Realities." [More information here.](#)

Today at 10:00 a.m., the Atlantic Council will hold a discussion titled "New Insights on American Views of Ukraine, Russia, and the War." [More information here.](#)

Today at 10:00 a.m., the Hudson Institute will hold a discussion titled "The Deepening Russia-China Partnership." [More information here.](#)

From Monday through Saturday, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank

Group will hold their 2025 Annual Meeting. [More information here.](#)

On Monday at 3:30 p.m., the Atlantic Council will hold a virtual discussion titled "What to Watch: Key Themes for the IMF-World Bank Annual Meetings." [More information here.](#)

From Tuesday through Wednesday, the George Washington University Elliott School of International Affairs Institute for Korean Studies will hold its virtual seventh annual North Korea Economic Forum Conference titled "Discerning North Korean Economic Strategies: Sanctions Enforcement, Trump-Era Policies, and Geopolitical Realignment." [More information here.](#)

On Tuesday at 9:00 a.m., the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research will hold a discussion titled "The Transatlantic Partnership in a Changing World." [More information here.](#)

On Tuesday at 9:00 a.m., the Hudson Institute will hold its Czech-US Defense and Security Forum. [More information here.](#)

On Tuesday at 10:00 a.m., the Brookings Institution will hold a discussion titled "Are Geopolitics Leading to Fragmentation of the International Financial System?" [More information here.](#)

On Tuesday at 4:00 p.m., the Atlantic Council will hold a discussion titled "Decoding the IMF's Fall 2025 World Economic Outlook" [More information here.](#)

On Tuesday at 6:00 p.m., the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies Center for Canadian Studies will hold a discussion titled "Canada and 21st Century Great Power Competition: Insights and Options." [More information here.](#)

On Wednesday at 1:00 p.m., the Center for a New American Security will hold a virtual discussion titled "Countering China's Digital Silk Road." [More information here.](#)

On Thursday at 9:30 a.m., the Arab Center will hold its 10th annual conference with the theme "Trump and the Middle East: A Second Term Review." [More information here.](#)

On Thursday at 10:00 a.m., the Hudson Institute will hold a discussion titled "The State of US-China Relations." [More information here.](#) Expected participants include:

- Rep. John Moolenaar (R-MI)

On Thursday at 11:00 a.m., the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft will hold a virtual discussion titled "Ukraine Peace Talks and the Pitfalls of Maximalism in a Multipolar World." [More information here.](#)

On Friday at 10:00 a.m., the National Institute for Deterrence Studies will hold a virtual seminar titled "Iran's Nuclear Crossroads: Strategic Risks and Diplomatic Dilemmas." [More information here.](#)

On Friday at 10:00 a.m., the Center for Strategic and International Studies will hold an event to highlight the release of the draft US Standards Strategy. [More information here.](#)

Healthcare

On Tuesday at 3:00 p.m., Health Affairs will hold a virtual discussion titled "Creating Conditions Vital to Health: Health Care's Role in Economic Progress." [More information here.](#)

On Wednesday at 11:00 a.m., US News & World Report will hold a virtual discussion titled "How Telehealth Is Transforming Pediatric Behavioral Health." [More information here.](#)

On Wednesday at 6:00 p.m., Georgetown University's Global Health Institute will hold a discussion on the National Institutes of Health, the International Human Genome Project, and addressing global health challenges. [More information here.](#)

Housing

On Wednesday at 10:00 a.m., the House Financial Services Committee Subcommittee on Digital Assets, Financial Technology, and Artificial Intelligence will hold a hearing titled "Building Capacity: Reducing Government Roadblocks to Housing Supply." [More information here.](#)

Judicial

On Tuesday at 12:00 p.m., the Federalist Society for Law and Public Policy Studies will hold a virtual discussion titled "State AGs and the Supreme Court 2025 Term." [More information here.](#)

On Wednesday at 8:00 p.m., Jews United for Democracy and Justice will hold a virtual discussion titled "Law, Politics, and Power: Perspectives on the Supreme Court." [More information here.](#)

Political

On Tuesday at 9:00 a.m., Punchbowl News will hold a discussion on the news of the day, retirement, and economic security. [More information here.](#) Expected participants include:

- Senator Dave McCormick (R-PA)

On Tuesday at 1:00 p.m., the Center for American Progress will hold a discussion titled "Undoing Citizens United and Reining in Super PACs." [More information here.](#)

On Tuesday at 6:00 p.m., the Federalist Society for Law and Public Policy Studies will hold a discussion titled "Regulatory Coordination and the Role of the Deputy Secretary." [More information here.](#)

On Wednesday at 3:00 p.m., the Brennan Center for Justice will hold a virtual discussion titled "Paying for Power." [More information here.](#)

Trade

On Tuesday at 3:00 p.m., the Peterson Institute for International Economics will hold a virtual discussion titled "Trade and the International Finance System." [More information here.](#)

On Wednesday at 9:00 a.m., the Peterson Institute for International Economics will hold a virtual discussion titled "A new trading landscape: How is the world adjusting?" [More information here.](#)

On Thursday at 9:00 a.m., the Peterson Institute for International Economics will hold a virtual discussion titled "The Changing Dollar Regime: An Update." [More information here.](#)

On Thursday at 9:30 a.m., the US Chamber of Commerce will hold its 2025 Transatlantic Business Works Summit, with the theme "Investing in Partnership, Securing Prosperity." [More information here.](#)

On Thursday at 10:00 a.m., the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation will hold a virtual discussion titled "How To Address Counterfeits From Chinese Online Marketplaces." [More information here.](#)

On Thursday at 1:30 p.m., the Peterson Institute for International Economics will hold a virtual discussion titled "Canada's economic outlook and global trade." [More information here.](#) Expected participants include:

- Tiff Macklem, governor, Bank of Canada

On Friday at 1:00 p.m., the Peterson Institute for International Economics will hold a virtual discussion titled "Europe in a Changing International Monetary System." [More information here.](#) Expected participants include:

- Agnès Bénassy-Quéré, second deputy governor, Banque de France
- Signe Krogstrup, governor, Danmarks Nationalbank

Afterthoughts

Hunt or be Hunter-ed: To promote the 19th annual launch of its camouflage-patterned “hunting cans,” Busch Light is offering one winner the chance to get [19 years of free beer](#). Beer lovers can enter the competition by legally changing their name to “Hunter.” The prize itself is a prepaid card with \$5,500 loaded on it, enough to cover the purchase of “one 30-pack of Busch Light a month for 19 years to cover all hunting seasons,” as well as the fees that come with legally changing a name. The name Hunter has declined in popularity by 93 percent over the past five years, and the brand said that it “refuses to let this name vanish into the brush, so it’s encouraging fans to become Hunters for life literally.” Busch Light is also hosting a gathering for anyone named Hunter in Appleton, Wisconsin in what would be one of the largest private gatherings of Hunters ever. For fans of the beer who prefer their original names, there are other rewards they can win, no name change required. Hidden among the packs of the hunting can beers are 500 Bush Light Blaze Orange Trophy collectible cans. Customers who find these special cans can enter to win a five-day whitetail deer rifle hunt in Missouri. So, whether you’re already named Hunter, plan to change your name to Hunter, or have no such plans, there’s a Busch Light prize for you.

“Excuse Me”: On the Seneca Lake in upstate New York, residents have been hearing [strange, inexplicable booming noises](#) on the river for centuries. Called the “Seneca Guns” or “Seneca Drums,” the cause of these sounds remained largely unknown until recently. The native Seneca tribes believed the sounds came from a deity trying to defend sacred hunting grounds. In American folklore, the booms were said to be the drumbeat of the ghost of a Revolutionary War soldier, still looking for his regiment. In the past, it was near impossible to study the noises because they were irregular and didn’t occur often. As one local news outlet put it, “like the foot of a rainbow, they are always ‘somewhere else’ when the observer moves to the locality from which they seem to come.” But, a recent sonar survey of the lake uncovered evidence of a potential explanation. The survey found craters along the lakebed, indicating that the river is releasing geological gases. In short, the lake is burping. Now, researchers are gathering water samples from the craters to test for these gasses. Hopefully, locals will soon understand what really causes the Seneca Guns.



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