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The People's Hour

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SOURCES Postal Service work to comply with Trump's executive order is rushed and sloppy, a whistleblower contends, 'Operation Rotten Apple' ICE nabs over 2K illegal migrants across NY — including child rapists, killers, Data center controversies, Investors prosper and consumers pay, Apple, OpenAI legal fight keeps escalating. How we got here

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- [AP Top News] Postal Service work to comply with Trump's executive order is rushed and sloppy, a whistleblower contends

<https://apnews.com/article/midterm-elections-postal-service-mail-voting-7f7cf4fdf2e9cf369ae96f96fbda03f2>

Why: A federal whistleblower says the agency rushed compliance work on ballot handling, raising real questions about whether your vote gets counted right - a government-competence story that hits every listener regardless of party.

- [New York Post] 'Operation Rotten Apple' ICE nabs over 2K illegal migrants across NY — including child rapists, killers

<https://nypost.com/2026/09/01/us-news/ice-nabs-more-than-2k-illegal-migrants-across-new-york-in-operation-rotten-apple-including-child-rapists-murderers/>

Why: A 2,000-arrest sweep in a sanctuary state including violent criminals is exactly the enforcement-is-working story this audience wants, with hard numbers and named category of offenders.

- [AP Top News] Data center controversies

<https://apnews.com/article/data-centers-rural-farm-artificial-intelligence-trump-e5a350af1bc12e6a4f470d3b68be51d7>

Why: Big Tech's AI data centers are gobbling up rural farmland, water and power while locals get the bill — a made-to-order anti-corporate-consolidation fight with midterm stakes.

- [AP Top News] Investors prosper and consumers pay

<https://apnews.com/article/iran-economy-stocks-trump-airlines-energy-oil-dd9861bbb882b04e1680f6b2847b3495>

Why: Wall Street cashes in on Mideast oil turmoil while ordinary Americans eat higher gas and airline prices — the classic 'who really pays' angle this audience wants explained plainly.

- [Axios] Apple, OpenAI legal fight keeps escalating. How we got here

<https://www.axios.com/2026/09/01/apple-openai-lawsuit-ai-gpt-devices>

Why: Two of the biggest tech giants are suing each other over AI device control — a big-tech accountability story that shows how little say ordinary users have over what's baked into their phones.

01 — OPENER JINGLE

[STING — markford_open.mp3]

02 — COLD OPEN (DATE SLATE + ROADMAP)

Good evening, America.

It is Wednesday, September second, twenty twenty-six. I'm Mark Ford and tonight we've got a full show for you. Government screw ups, sanctuary city cover-ups, and a hard look at who actually cashes in when the world catches fire. Let's get into it.

First up, the Mail Ballot Mess. The Postal Service is trying to build a brand-new ballot verification computer system in three months flat. Three months. That's the timeline Trump's executive order gave them, and now a whistleblower inside the agency is calling the whole rollout sloppy and dangerous. There's a zero-percent error rule in this system that sounds good on paper, but it could get entire batches of legitimate ballots thrown in the trash over nothing. A typo. A smudge. A scanner having a bad day. This fight is already bouncing between a federal judge and the Supreme Court, and nobody in Washington can tell you for sure whether your mail ballot is going to count in the midterms. We're going to break down exactly what this means for you if you vote by mail this fall.

Then we're moving to New York, where ICE just wrapped up something called Operation Rotten Apple. Over two thousand illegal migrants swept up across the city. Convicted killers. Convicted rapists. People who had no business walking around free in the first place. And here's the part that should make you angry. Mayor Mamdani and Governor Hochul gave federal agents zero help doing it. Zero. Meanwhile, New York's sanctuary policies have already let more than thirteen thousand criminal aliens back onto the streets over the years. We're going to talk about what happens when federal agents have to do the job local politicians refuse to do.

Segment three, we're heading out to rural America, where something strange is happening. Data centers. Over seven hundred billion dollars in construction this year alone, and it has quietly turned into one of the biggest fights of this election cycle. Ranchers and environmentalists, two groups that usually can't agree on the time of day, are standing shoulder to shoulder against these companies that are eating up water and farmland for server farms. Trump is defending the industry, says we need it to beat China in the AI race, but even he's admitting it needs better public relations. States like Texas and New York are already writing new regulations to slow it down. We'll tell you what's happening in your backyard, because this one is closer than you think.

And finally, tonight's big question. Who wins when the world burns. We are six months into the Iran war now. Wall Street is posting big gains. Big gains. Meanwhile regular families are paying more for jet fuel, more for groceries, more for fertilizer. The poorest countries on this planet are getting pushed toward outright hunger. Electric vehicle sales are spiking worldwide because gas prices won't quit climbing. And here's the kicker. The Trump family's own businesses, their own stock holdings, are cashing in on military contracts and oil and gas deals while the president's political numbers take a hit. We're going to follow the money tonight, and I promise you, it leads somewhere interesting.

Rushed voting systems. Sanctuary politicians protecting criminals instead of citizens. Rural America getting bulldozed for server farms. And a war economy that's making the rich richer while your grocery bill climbs. That's the show tonight.

Stay with us. This is The People's Hour, on The Mark Ford Show, right here on WRZF. We'll be right back.

03 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

04 — SEGMENT A: THE MAIL BALLOT MESS

Let me talk about the mail this morning. Not your mail. Your ballot.

If you vote by mail, and about one out of every three of you do, you need to hear this, because there is a computer system getting built right now, in a hurry, that could decide whether your vote ever gets counted. And the people building it are telling on themselves.

Here is the setup. Back in March, President Trump signed an executive order aimed at mail voting. He has never liked mail voting. He blamed it for his loss in 2020, even though he lost that election fair and square to Joe Biden, and even though he himself votes by mail. That is not me being snarky. That is just the record. He has spent years trash-talking a method of voting he personally uses.

The executive order does a few things. It tells U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and the Social Security Administration to build citizenship lists, state by state. Then it tells the Postal Service that mail ballots can only go out to voters who show up on those lists. On top of that, ballot envelopes have to meet new Postal Service rules, including bar codes. All of this runs through a brand new online portal, where states are supposed to upload their lists of verified voters so the Postal Service knows who gets a ballot and who does not.

Sounds tidy on paper. Now let me tell you how it is actually getting built.

A whistleblower came forward, and Democratic Senator Richard Blumenthal released the statement earlier this week, on Tuesday. The whistleblower is not named. But what they described is a mess. The Postal Service normally takes a year, sometimes longer, to build a complex system like this. They have been trying to do it in three months. And they have been doing it while under a court order telling them to stop.

Here is the timeline, because it matters. The Postal Service started building the portal on June fifteenth. Ten days later, on June twenty-fifth, a federal judge in Boston, Indira Talwani, ordered them to halt. So they

stopped. Then on July twenty-ninth, they started right back up again, the same day the administration appealed Judge Talwani's order to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court did not rule until August twenty-fourth. So for almost a full month, the Postal Service was building this thing while the legal fight was still open. Judge Talwani later found that the Postal Service had in fact violated her order by continuing that work. She didn't sanction anybody for it. She just noted it and moved on. Think about that. A federal judge catches a federal agency defying her order, and nothing happens.

Then on August twenty-first, at night, the Postal Service released its final rule on how all this would work. The rule says they will only send mail ballots for states that get their envelope design approved and submit their voter list through that same portal, the one that still was not even active. That gave the plaintiffs, a coalition of Democrats and civil rights groups, a fresh opening to sue again. And on Thursday night last week, Judge Talwani issued a fourteen day restraining order blocking the whole thing from going into effect.

So where does that leave us tonight. In legal limbo, with the clock running out. And the clock matters here more than almost anything else, because the first mail ballots for the midterms start going out this Friday, in North Carolina. Election officials there have already said, on the record, that this system could not possibly be ready in time. Not "might be tight." Could not be ready.

Now let's get into what the whistleblower actually says is wrong with this thing, because this is the part that should worry you even if you don't care one bit about the politics.

The group representing the whistleblower, Whistleblower Aid, put it plainly. Quote. The apparently sloppy and rushed manner in which the Federal Ballot Mail Portal and supporting IT systems are being built poses significant risk. End quote. And then this line, which I want you to sit with. Quote. Potentially millions of American voters may not receive their mail-in ballot this election cycle in a timely manner, or at all. End quote.

Millions. Not thousands. Millions.

Here's the mechanism. The whistleblower describes what's being called a zero percent rule. Ballots get handled at a physical post office by an election official. They get scanned, checked against the voter database, run through three separate layers of verification. Sounds thorough, right? Except the rule says if there is a single error anywhere in a batch, even one mistake buried inside tens of thousands of otherwise perfectly legitimate ballots, the whole batch can get thrown out. Not the one bad envelope. The whole batch.

Think about what that means in practice. A county clerk somewhere processes thirty thousand mail ballots. One scanner glitch, one bar code that doesn't read right, one clerical slip by an overworked election office in October with a deadline breathing down their neck, and every single voter in that batch, all thirty thousand of them, people who filled out their ballot correctly, signed it, mailed it on time, could have their vote never counted. Not because they did anything wrong. Because somebody else's scan hiccupped.

That is not an election security measure. That is a system that punishes innocent voters for somebody else's computer error, and it does it at scale, potentially in the millions.

Blumenthal did not mince words about it. He told reporters, before releasing the whistleblower material, quote. The Postal Service has designed a system to disenfranchise millions of Americans. End quote. He went further. Quote. This administration seems hell-bent on changing the framework on casting ballots in this country clearly for political reasons. End quote.

Now the White House is going to tell you this is all about fraud. They've called the mail voting provisions, quote, commonsense measures, end quote, to combat fraud. Let's just check that against the facts, because facts are cheap and I like using them. The Brookings Institution put out a report in 2025 looking at mail voting fraud nationwide. You know what they found? About four cases of fraud out of every ten million mail ballots cast. Four. Out of ten million. That is not a crime wave. That is a rounding error. You have a better chance of getting struck by lightning while holding a winning lottery ticket than you do of committing mail ballot fraud and getting caught doing it, because there is almost none of it to catch.

So if the actual fraud problem is four in ten million, and the fix is a rushed, defective system that a whistleblower says could disenfranchise millions of legitimate voters, you have to ask yourself what the real goal is here. Because the math doesn't support fraud prevention. The math supports something else.

And here's a piece of context that tells you a lot. Mail voting used to be split evenly between the two parties. Republicans and Democrats used it about the same. That changed after 2020, once Trump started attacking it. Since then, mail voting has become more of a Democratic habit. In 2024, more than twenty-nine percent of all voters, nearly one in three, cast their ballot by mail. So when you take a voting method that skews toward one party and you build a system with a hair trigger that can wipe out entire batches of ballots on a technicality, you don't need a conspiracy theory to see where that lands. You just need arithmetic.

Now, where does this go from here. The Supreme Court's conservative majority, last week, sided with the Trump administration and lifted Judge Talwani's original injunction, but they did not rule on whether the executive order itself is legal. They just said the injunction was premature. That is a technical ruling, not a green light. The fight is not over. Talwani's new fourteen day restraining order is still in place. The administration is appealing. This thing could very well end up back at the Supreme Court before the midterms are even finished.

Blumenthal says he has, quote, a very strong hope and some faith that our system of justice will strike down this unconstitutional and unconscionable rule, end quote. But here's the part that should stick with you. He also said that if this system somehow does go into effect for the midterms, his advice would be, do not vote by mail. Think about that for a second. A sitting United States senator is telling voters not to trust the mail ballot system, in the same country where nearly a third of us vote that way.

So what does this mean if you are a regular person sitting at your kitchen table trying to figure out how to cast your vote this fall. It means the rules could change on you between now and Election Day, more than once, by court order. It means a system that was rushed together in three months instead of

the year or more it should have taken is about to go live in one of the biggest voting states in the country, starting this Friday, while the litigation is still unresolved. And it means a single scanning error, something completely outside your control, done by somebody you'll never meet, in a batch you didn't even know you were part of, could be the reason your ballot never gets counted.

That is not election security. That is election roulette, and the house isn't even pretending to be neutral about who wins.

Let's go a little deeper into how this whole thing has been handled by the people running it, because the silence tells you almost as much as the whistleblower complaint does.

When reporters asked the Postal Service to respond to all this, on Monday night, they said nothing. No comment. Zero. And when reporters went to the White House on Tuesday, the same day Blumenthal put the whistleblower statement out, the White House did not respond either. You've got a whistleblower saying millions of ballots could vanish into a rushed computer system, and the two agencies with the most explaining to do just went quiet. That is not the behavior of people confident they're building something solid. That is the behavior of people who know the cameras are pointed at a mess and they'd rather not talk about it on the record.

And this fits a pattern, because this executive order didn't come out of nowhere. Since he got back into office, Trump has said Republicans should be, quote, taking over, end quote, vote counting in Democratic areas. Read that again. Not observing. Not auditing. Taking over. He has also launched a sweeping effort to reinvestigate the 2020 election, an election he lost to Joe Biden fair and square, despite a mountain of evidence he lost that race fairly. None of that has stopped him from relitigating it for six years running. So when the same administration builds a brand new system to filter mail ballots, and does it in a rush, and does it while defying a judge's order, you're not looking at an isolated incident. You're looking at a continuation of the same project he's been running since November of 2020.

Now let's go back to Judge Talwani for a second, because there was a wrinkle in her ruling this week that I don't want you to miss. On Monday, she refused to lift the restraining order blocking implementation. Good. But in that same ruling, she said the Postal Service could keep working on the portal itself, as long as it wasn't forcing states to actually use it yet. So the building keeps going. The clock keeps ticking. The only thing paused is flipping the switch to make states rely on it. That is a narrow needle to thread, and it tells you the court itself is trying to balance two things that don't balance well: stopping a bad rollout, while not freezing the entire Postal Service in place while the case plays out.

And here's the detail from the whistleblower complaint that ties all of this together. The internal goal, according to the disclosure, was to have the portal active by this past Tuesday. Not tested. Not audited. Active. On a specific date, picked to hit a deadline, not picked because the system was actually ready. That is how you get a portal that Whistleblower Aid describes as sloppy and rushed. You don't get careful, well-tested government software by picking a date on a calendar and building backward from it under threat of a lawsuit. You get exactly what the whistleblower says they're getting: a system that hasn't undergone full testing, going live anyway, with real people's ballots running through it.

Let's talk about who actually processes these ballots, because this isn't some abstract server farm out in Virginia. The rule requires ballots to be handled in a physical post office, by an actual election official, a person with a job and a shift and a stack of mail in front of them. That person scans the ballots. The scan gets checked against the voter database. There are three layers of verification stacked on top of each other. On paper, three layers of checking sounds like a good thing, like extra safety. But remember the rule underneath all of it: one apparent error, anywhere in that chain, at any one of those three layers, and the whole batch gets tossed. Not fixed. Not flagged for a second look. Tossed.

Picture the actual human being doing this job in the middle of October, with early voting underway, with a line of ballots to get through before the mail truck leaves, with a supervisor asking why the numbers are behind

schedule. That is exactly the kind of environment where somebody misreads a bar code, or a scanner has a bad day, or a database entry has a typo from a data transfer that happened months earlier and nobody caught. In a normal system, you fix the one bad envelope and the other twenty-nine thousand, nine hundred ninety-nine ballots go through just fine. In this system, according to the whistleblower, that one mistake can sink the entire batch. You built a hair trigger and handed it to overworked people during the busiest stretch of the election calendar.

Now, the administration's defenders are going to say I'm exaggerating, that this is a worst case scenario, that of course they'll work out the kinks before Election Day. Maybe. But ask yourself why a federal judge has now had to intervene twice, why a whistleblower felt the need to go around the normal channels and hand a sworn statement to a sitting senator, and why election officials in North Carolina, a state getting ballots out the door this Friday, are on the record saying flatly this system could not be ready in time. Those aren't Democratic talking points. Those are people whose actual job is running elections, telling you the system isn't ready, right before it goes live in their state.

And let's not lose sight of the stakes here, because North Carolina is not some afterthought in a midterm election. Whatever happens there in the next few weeks with this portal is going to be the test case for every other state watching to see if this thing actually works, or if it locks legitimate voters out of the process before their ballots even leave the post office.

Here's another way to think about the zero percent rule that I haven't said yet. Every system that processes paperwork at scale has an error rate. Banks have one. The IRS has one. Your own doctor's office has one. Nobody designs a system assuming perfection, because perfection doesn't exist when human beings and machines are both involved. Except this one does. This one assumes zero errors are acceptable, and when that assumption gets violated, which it will, because every system eventually has a hiccup, the punishment doesn't fall on whoever made the mistake. It falls on tens of thousands of voters who had nothing to do with it. That is backwards. That is designing a

system around an impossible standard and then making innocent people absorb the cost when reality doesn't cooperate.

I keep coming back to that Brookings number because it's the whole ballgame. Four fraudulent mail ballots out of every ten million cast. If you wanted to build a system proportional to that actual risk, you'd need something almost invisible, a light-touch check that catches the rare bad actor without threatening the other nine million, nine hundred ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred ninety-six legitimate voters in that same ten million. Instead we got a system that can nuke entire batches over a single scanning hiccup. That's not proportional. That's not commonsense, whatever the White House wants to call it. That's a sledgehammer built for a problem the size of a thumbtack, and the collateral damage lands on ordinary voters who did everything right.

Whistleblower Aid, the organization that put the disclosure together and worked with Blumenthal's office to release it, didn't hedge on what they think is at stake. Their language was direct: potentially millions of Americans might not get their ballot in time, or at all. When an organization built specifically to protect and vet whistleblowers puts its name behind language that stark, they are not doing that casually. They know that statement is going to get scrutinized by reporters, by the Postal Service's lawyers, by whoever ends up arguing this case in front of the Supreme Court if it gets there again. They said it anyway.

So here's where this actually sits tonight, September second. The portal is being built. The legal fight is bouncing between Judge Talwani in Boston and the Supreme Court in Washington, and there's a real chance it lands back at the Supreme Court a second time before the midterms are decided. North Carolina ballots start going out this Friday under rules that the state's own election officials say the system can't support. And the fourteen day restraining order Talwani issued last week is the only thing standing between where we are now and full implementation of a rule that a sitting senator says was designed to disenfranchise people, and that a whistleblower says wasn't even properly tested before going live.

If you vote by mail this fall, you are not just trusting the post office to deliver an envelope anymore. You are trusting a brand new computer system, built in three months instead of the year it should have taken, run by people who won't answer a reporter's question about it, governed by a rule that can throw out your legitimate vote because of somebody else's mistake three names down the batch. That is the reality regular voters are being handed right now, whether they asked for it or not.

We'll be right back.

05 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

06 — SEGMENT B: ROTTEN APPLE AND SANCTUARY POLITICS

Let me tell you what happened in New York, because it is the clearest picture you are going to get of what sanctuary politics actually costs regular people.

Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin stood up Tuesday and announced the results of something called Operation Rotten Apple. Over the course of about a month, from July twenty-seventh through August twenty-ninth, Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents fanned out across New York state and arrested two thousand one hundred and ninety-seven illegal migrants. Not two thousand. Not "about two thousand." Two thousand one hundred and ninety-seven, by name, on the books.

Now here is the part that should stop you cold. These were not people picked up for jaywalking or a busted taillight. Read the list Mullin's people put out.

Bogdan Detrovich Gren. Ukrainian national, in this country illegally, with convictions for kidnapping, abduction resulting in death, criminal possession of a weapon, and murder. Murder. That man was walking around New York.

Andreas Bernal Chiquito. Illegal migrant from Colombia. Prior arrests for sexual conduct against a child and injuring a child under seventeen.

Palvinder Singh. Illegal migrant from India, already convicted of rape in Germany before he ever set foot here.

Carlos Mendez-Acosta. Venezuelan migrant, convicted of rape.

That is four names. There were two thousand one hundred and ninety-three more people in that operation, and DHS says among them were more convicted murderers, rapists, and drug traffickers. This was not a sweep of nervous families trying to build a life. This was law enforcement going after violent criminals who happened to be in the country illegally, and who New York's own leadership had, in effect, decided to leave alone.

And that is the real story here. Because Mullin did not just announce the arrests. He told everybody exactly how this operation got done. Quote. Operation Rotten Apple did what sanctuary politicians in New York City and the state of New York refuse to do: made the Empire State safer. End quote. And he made a point of saying it happened with, quote, no help, end quote, from Mayor Zohran Mamdani or Governor Kathy Hochul.

Let's sit with that for a second. The federal government had to go into the largest city in America and round up murderers and child predators, and the mayor of that city and the governor of that state provided zero assistance. Not reluctant assistance. Not slow-walked assistance. Zero.

Why? Because both of them have built their entire approach to public safety around keeping federal immigration agents as far away as possible from anyone in this country illegally, criminal record or not.

Mamdani signed an executive order right after he took office in January, reinforcing New York City's sanctuary protections. He called federal immigration enforcement, quote, abusive immigration enforcement, end quote. Since then he has pushed through additional legislation making it even harder for local police to cooperate with ICE. Up in Albany, Hochul did her part too. She got legislation passed that bars state police from partnering

with federal immigration authorities at all, and it keeps ICE agents out of most public places, including hospitals and parks.

So picture the system these two built. A violent criminal who is in the country illegally gets arrested by local police. Under the old way of doing things, ICE gets a call, comes and picks him up, and starts the process of removing him. Under Mamdani and Hochul's system, that does not happen. The local cops cannot even tell ICE he is there. He gets processed on whatever the local charge was, and then he walks back out onto the street. Not because a judge found him innocent. Because the politicians in charge decided that cooperating with federal immigration law is worse than letting him go.

DHS put a number on what that policy has actually produced. They say those sanctuary policies have resulted in more than thirteen thousand criminal aliens being released back onto New York streets. Thirteen thousand. That is not two thousand one hundred and ninety-seven arrested in one operation. That is thirteen thousand who were already caught, already known to law enforcement, and let go anyway because the state decided ICE was the enemy, not the criminal.

Tom Homan, the administration's border czar, put it about as plainly as it can be put. Quote. Democratic politicians in New York and elsewhere say that they care about public safety, but won't let immigration law enforcement officers into their jails to take criminals into custody, instead they release them to their streets. It makes no sense. End quote.

He is right. It makes no sense, unless you understand what the actual goal is. The goal for Mamdani and Hochul is not maximum safety. If it were, they would be handing ICE a list every morning of every violent offender sitting in their custody who happens to be here illegally. The goal is to signal, to a certain political audience, that New York will never, ever cooperate with federal immigration enforcement, no matter who gets hurt as a result.

And Mullin was blunt about where this leaves state and local politicians going forward. Quote. We won't let sanctuary politicians stand in our way. If

you're a state or local politician, your best bet is to cooperate with us so we can all make America safe again. End quote.

Now I want to be fair here, because the other side has an argument, and you should hear it so you understand exactly what you are rejecting. The argument from sanctuary-city defenders is that if local police cooperate with ICE, immigrant communities stop trusting the police altogether. Victims of crime and witnesses to crime, even people here legally, get scared to come forward, because they worry any contact with police could turn into a deportation proceeding for a neighbor or a family member. So the sanctuary policy, in theory, is supposed to make communities safer by keeping cooperation between residents and police intact.

That is a real argument. It is not crazy on its face. But look at what it actually requires you to believe in practice. It requires you to believe that the correct response to that trust problem is a blanket rule that also protects convicted murderers and child rapists from federal enforcement. Nobody designed a policy that says "we will cooperate with ICE on violent felons but not on everyday undocumented workers." Mamdani and Hochul built systems that draw no such line. Bogdan Gren, convicted of murder, gets the same protection under that policy as somebody who overstayed a work visa and has never broken another law in his life. That is the flaw. A policy built to protect trust between communities and police ends up, as written, protecting killers from removal.

And that is exactly why Operation Rotten Apple had to happen the way it did. ICE could not simply call up the NYPD or the state police and ask for a hand-off. They had to run an independent, monthlong operation, tracking down two thousand one hundred and ninety-seven people themselves, without the state's databases, without local jail cooperation, without a single assist from the two most powerful elected officials in New York. They had to do the whole job alone, in a state where their own government made it as difficult as legally possible.

Think about the resources that takes. Think about how many of those thirteen thousand criminal aliens Homan mentioned are still out there right now, because ICE simply does not have the manpower to run an Operation

Rotten Apple in every state, every month, chasing down people the state itself already had in custody once and let go.

This is the trade sanctuary politicians are making, whether they say it out loud or not. They are trading the safety of the general public for a political stance on immigration enforcement. And when Bogdan Gren or somebody like him hurts a New Yorker after being released instead of turned over to federal custody, the politicians who built that system do not pay the price. The victim does.

I will give Mullin credit for one more thing he said, because it is the honest version of what every sanctuary politician in this country is being told right now. Quote. If you're a state or local politician, your best bet is to cooperate with us so we can all make America safe again. End quote. That is not a threat. That is a description of how law enforcement is supposed to work. Different levels of government, working together, to keep dangerous people off the street. New York broke that arrangement on purpose. And when it broke, the federal government had to step in and do the job itself, at massive expense, chasing down two thousand one hundred and ninety-seven people who should have already been in federal custody months or years ago.

Mamdani ran on being the voice of the people of New York City. Hochul governs the entire state. Neither one of them lifted a finger to help get convicted rapists and a convicted murderer off the streets of their own communities. That is not a policy dispute anymore. That is a governing failure, and the people of New York are the ones who live with the consequences, one arrest report at a time.

Let's go back to that press conference for a second, because the details of who was standing next to Mullin tell you something the topline arrest number does not.

Mullin held that briefing on Tuesday with two other officials flanking him. Ken Genalo, who runs Enforcement and Removal Operations for ICE in New York City, and Philip Rhoney, the acting field office director for ICE's Buffalo operation. Think about what that pairing means. Buffalo is not New York City. Buffalo is up on the Canadian border, hours from Manhattan, a completely

different part of the state, a completely different field office with its own staff and its own caseload. When the acting director from Buffalo is standing at the podium next to the Secretary of Homeland Security, that tells you this was not a Manhattan sweep with a press release slapped on it. This was a genuine statewide operation, downstate and upstate both, hitting every corner of New York the same way.

That matters because the sanctuary laws Hochul signed apply to the whole state, not just the five boroughs. Every county sheriff, every state trooper, everywhere from Buffalo to Brooklyn, operates under the same restriction. They cannot partner with federal immigration authorities. So ICE did not just have a Mamdani problem in New York City. They had a Hochul problem across the entire map of New York. And they ran the operation anyway, statewide, without a single hand from either level of state government.

Now look at where these two thousand one hundred and ninety-seven people actually came from, because it undercuts one of the laziest arguments you hear about immigration enforcement, which is that it is really just about one group of people from one part of the world. Bogdan Gren came from Ukraine. Andreas Bernal Chiquito came from Colombia. Palvinder Singh came from India. Carlos Mendez-Acosta came from Venezuela. Four names, four continents worth of origin between them, roughly speaking. This was not a raid targeting one nationality. It was a law enforcement operation targeting criminal conduct, and criminal conduct does not care what passport a person used to use to not have.

Sit with the Palvinder Singh case for a minute, because it is maybe the most damning detail in the whole story. Singh was convicted of rape in Germany. Not here. There. A European country had already put him through a criminal justice system and found him guilty of one of the worst crimes on the books, full stop. That is not a man who slipped through the cracks because nobody knew who he was. That is a man with an existing international criminal record who still ended up living in New York, protected by a state policy that made it harder for federal authorities to find him and remove him. If a convicted rapist with a documented conviction in another country can walk around New York for any length of time, the system is not

failing quietly somewhere in the paperwork. It is failing by design, because the design is "make it hard for ICE," full stop, with no carve-out for people who already have a rape conviction on their record from a different country's courts.

And remember, DHS said the arrests also included convicted drug traffickers. The release does not put a number on how many, but think about what a drug trafficking conviction actually represents. That is not a person caught with a small amount for personal use. That is somebody who was moving product, supplying a distribution network, profiting off addiction in somebody's neighborhood. Every one of those traffickers who spent even one extra month walking around New York because the state would not help federal agents locate them is a month where whatever supply chain they were part of kept running.

Here is the operational cost nobody in Albany or City Hall wants to talk about. Under a normal cooperative arrangement, when a criminal alien gets arrested by local police anywhere in New York, ICE places what is called a detainer, a formal request asking the jail to hold that person an extra window of time so federal agents can come take custody before release. That is the efficient way to do this. The person is already sitting in a cell. Somebody just has to drive over and pick them up.

Hochul and Mamdani built a system that refuses that handoff. So what happens instead? The person serves whatever local sentence or gets processed on whatever local charge, and then walks out the door, back into the general population, back into an apartment, back onto a subway, back into a job somewhere off the books. Now ICE does not know where that person sleeps at night. They do not have an address. They have to go find them the way you would find anybody else who does not want to be found, through investigative work, surveillance, tips, months of legwork. That is exactly what Operation Rotten Apple was. Two thousand one hundred and ninety-seven individual manhunts, essentially, for people the state already had in custody once and voluntarily let go.

Multiply that by the thirteen thousand DHS says are already back on New York streets under these sanctuary policies, and you start to understand the

scale of the self-inflicted problem. Every one of those thirteen thousand is a person federal agents will eventually have to locate from scratch, the hard way, because the easy way, the handoff at the jailhouse door, got outlawed by the governor's office.

Now think about Hochul's other move, the one barring ICE agents from most public places, including hospitals and parks. On its face that sounds like it is protecting sick people and families out for an afternoon. In practice, it means there are now categories of physical space in New York where a violent criminal alien can walk in and become, for that stretch of time, functionally untouchable by federal law enforcement. A park. A hospital waiting room. Ordinary places where ordinary New Yorkers take their kids or go get treated for something, turned into safe harbor zones for people ICE is actively trying to locate and remove. Nobody voting for that policy stood up and said out loud, "this will make it easier for a convicted rapist to avoid federal custody in a public park." But that is what the plain language of the policy does.

And go back to Mamdani's own words for a second, because they deserve a harder look than I gave them a moment ago. He called federal immigration enforcement, quote, abusive immigration enforcement, end quote. Apply that label to Operation Rotten Apple specifically. Is it abusive to arrest a man convicted of kidnapping, abduction resulting in death, and murder? Is it abusive to take into custody someone with a rape conviction already on his record from another country? Mamdani's executive order was written in broad, sweeping language, reinforcing sanctuary protections across the board, and broad, sweeping language does not carve out an exception for murderers. Under the mayor's own framing, taking Bogdan Gren off the street counts as abuse. That is not a gotcha. That is just what happens when you write a blanket policy instead of a targeted one.

This is where the politics get honest, whether the politicians want them to or not. Midterm elections are coming, and immigration enforcement is shaping up to be one of the sharpest dividing lines on the ballot in states exactly like New York. Sanctuary politicians are betting that voters will reward them for standing up to the federal government on principle.

Operation Rotten Apple is a two thousand one hundred and ninety-seven person answer to that bet. It puts names, countries of origin, and specific convictions on the table, in public, right before voters start paying attention. Kidnapping. Abduction resulting in death. Murder. Sexual conduct against a child. Rape, twice over, once on foreign soil. That is not an abstract debate about federalism anymore. Those are four sentences any voter in New York can read in about ten seconds and understand completely.

Mullin's people did not have to spin this one. They just had to publish the list.

So here is where I land on it. Sanctuary policy in New York was sold as a way to build trust and protect vulnerable communities. What it actually built, in practice, on the ground, was a thirteen-thousand-person backlog of criminal aliens the state already had in its hands and released, and a monthlong federal manhunt that had to relocate two thousand one hundred and ninety-seven of them one at a time, from Buffalo to Manhattan, with zero help from the governor or the mayor. Kathy Hochul and Zohran Mamdani did not make New York safer by refusing to cooperate. They made the job of keeping violent criminals off the street slower, harder, and more expensive, and they made it somebody else's problem to fix. Federal agents fixed it anyway. New Yorkers should ask their governor and their mayor why that job wasn't theirs to begin with.

We'll be right back.

07 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

08 — SEGMENT C: DATA CENTERS TAKE OVER THE MAP

Let me tell you about a fight happening in places you'd never expect. Not in Washington. Not on cable news. In county commission meetings in New

Mexico. In ranching towns in Texas. In farm country all over this nation. And it's about to shape the midterm elections in a way almost nobody saw coming.

Here's the story. Two years ago, hardly anybody in this country had ever heard the term "data center." Then OpenAI put out ChatGPT back in late twenty twenty-two, and it set off a stampede. Every tech company in America decided they needed to build massive computing warehouses to run these chatbots and AI tools. And I mean massive money. Oracle, Meta, Google, Amazon, Microsoft. Those five companies alone are on track to pour more than seven hundred billion dollars into data centers in the United States this year. Seven hundred billion. In one year.

Now where do you put something that big? You need huge tracts of land. Miles of it. So these companies have gone hunting in rural America. Cattle country. Farm country. Places where land is cheap and nobody's watching too closely. And that's where this thing has turned into a political grenade.

Here's what's wild. This fight has united people who normally can't stand each other. Conservative ranchers and farmers on one side. Left-leaning environmental groups on the other. And they've found themselves standing shoulder to shoulder, worried about the exact same things. Drought-stricken rivers. Pollution near the fields that grow our food. Farmland disappearing under concrete and steel.

Take New Mexico. Oracle and OpenAI are building something called Project Jupiter. It's a data center complex near the Mexican border, price tag of one hundred and sixty-five billion dollars. And the concern down there is water. New Mexico is a state already hammered by drought. The Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental group, went to court over it. They challenged the state for approving well-drilling permits that would send millions of gallons of water to that complex. Their argument. The state ignored its own public notification laws when it handed out that approval last year.

Now here's a name worth remembering. Samantha Barncastle Salopek. She's a water rights lawyer. Comes from a pecan-farming family. And she's not some outside activist parachuting in. She's running for a seat on the Doña

Ana County commission, as a Republican, because she's worried about what happens to farmers' and ranchers' water rights in a state that's already running dry. Quote. Farmers and ranchers are worried about their water rights. End quote. That's not a talking point from an environmental group. That's a Republican farm-country lawyer running for local office because of a data center.

That right there tells you how this issue scrambles the normal political lines. This isn't Democrats versus Republicans. This is rural communities versus a handful of the richest corporations on earth, and the water table underneath their own land.

Now, where does President Trump stand on all this? And this is interesting, because he's actually bucking the political wind on it. Politicians in both parties are running away from data centers right now. Communities are organizing to block them. But Trump keeps defending the industry. Just last week he said, quote, if I were a mayor or a governor with a chance to land a big data center, I would absolutely want it, because the jobs are enormous and the money paid, the taxes paid, are just enormous. End quote.

But even Trump admitted something telling in that same breath. He said data centers need, quote, a little public relations help. End quote. That's the President of the United States, the industry's biggest booster, basically conceding these things have an image problem. And he knows why. He sees this as a national security race. He wants America to win the AI fight against China, and he views data centers as the front line of that war. His administration is pushing to hook these facilities straight into power plants and high-voltage lines, and they're even looking at converting old Cold War uranium enrichment sites into data center and power complexes.

So you've got the President treating this like a matter of national survival, while regular families in farm country are treating it like a threat to their water and their land. Both of those things are true at the same time. That's the tension driving this whole fight.

And the politicians who actually have to answer to these communities are starting to move. Governors who once rolled out the red carpet for data

center projects are now backing away or tightening the screws. Some states have already pulled the sales tax exemptions they used to hand these projects for free. Other states are forcing data centers to pay for their own electricity, limit how much water they can suck up, disclose more about what they're actually doing, and win support from the local community before they get a permit or a tax break.

Look at Texas. Republican Governor Greg Abbott ordered state regulators to make sure regular Texans aren't seeing their electric bills go up because some data center down the road is hogging the grid. And he's promised to push a tougher legislative agenda next year, including stripping away a tax break for data centers worth more than a billion dollars a year. A billion dollars a year, just handed over in Texas, and Abbott wants to claw it back.

Then look at New York. Governor Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, just ordered a full one-year ban on large data centers in her state. A full stop. When you've got a conservative Texas governor and a liberal New York governor both moving in the same direction, cracking down on the same industry, that tells you this isn't a partisan issue. It's a kitchen-table issue.

Now there's another piece to this, and it's about power. Not political power. Electricity. These data centers eat electricity like nothing you've ever seen, because training and running AI systems takes an enormous amount of computing power. That demand has kicked off the biggest construction boom in natural gas power plants this country has ever had. At the same time, it's got clean energy advocates scrambling to make sure these facilities don't get built off of dirty power and blow up climate targets that states worked years to put in place.

Michigan, Oregon, and Minnesota have all passed laws in the last year and a half to protect their existing rules that utilities has go emissions-free by twenty forty. California's got similar legislation moving right now as their session wraps up. And in Georgia, Colorado, and North Carolina, environmental groups and big corporations with their own clean energy pledges are fighting it out with the old monopoly utilities that control the power grid, trying to force them to change how they supply these data centers.

Now here's a wrinkle. Not everybody in this fight is against the data centers. The building trades unions are all in favor. Massive numbers of union workers are employed building these projects right now. Union locals are scrambling to recruit new apprentices and expand their training centers because the demand is so explosive. National union leaders say their ranks are growing faster than they've ever seen in their careers. And the tech companies are pouring millions into training programs to keep that pipeline full.

These unions aren't just working the job sites either. They're showing up. When there's a packed town council meeting and a data center project is on the agenda and angry residents are lined up to complain, it's often union members standing up to answer those complaints, not the tech company executives. The Googles and the Amazons of the world tend to stay quiet at those meetings. The union guys don't.

So here's where this leaves us heading into the midterms. You've got a President who sees data centers as critical infrastructure in a global tech war, telling governors and mayors they'd be foolish not to want one. You've got rural Americans, conservative and liberal alike, standing in front of bulldozers because they're scared for their water and their farmland. You've got Republican governors in Texas and Democratic governors in New York both moving to rein the industry in, from opposite ends of the political spectrum. You've got union workers building the things and defending them at town halls, while environmental groups and old-school ranching families fight the exact same battle from the exact same side of the room.

This is what a real bottom-up political fight looks like. It's not being run out of party headquarters. It's not being scripted by consultants. It's farmers and ranchers and construction workers and environmentalists figuring out, community by community, whether these massive buildings full of computer servers are worth what they cost in water, land, and electricity. And candidates in both parties, all the way up to the White House, are having to answer for it whether they like it or not.

My take is simple. When Wall Street's money and Washington's ambitions collide with a farmer's water well, the farmer usually loses, unless he shows

up and makes noise. Right now, all over this country, people are showing up. And that's exactly why this quiet fight over server farms has turned into one of the biggest sleeper issues of this election.

Let me show you what this actually looks like on the ground, because it's easy to talk about billions of dollars and lose sight of what these things actually are. Up in Lowell, Massachusetts, there's a data center built by an outfit called the Markley Group. And where did they put it? Right over a ballpark. Right over a residential neighborhood. Kids playing Little League with a server farm looming behind the outfield fence. Down in Texas, in Hale County, near a little town called Abernathy, they're clearing ground right now for another one of these things. Flat farmland, the kind that's grown cotton and grain for generations, getting graded for concrete pads and cooling towers instead. That's the trade-off in plain terms. A ballpark under a server farm's shadow. Cotton fields turned into computing warehouses. That's not an abstraction. That's Tuesday afternoon in Hale County, Texas.

And here's the thing nobody in Washington wants to say out loud. This entire boom, all seven hundred billion dollars of it this year, is happening at the exact same time this country is dealing with a shooting war overseas that's been rattling the economy for six months now. Back in February, the United States and Israel struck Iran, and the predictions right after that were about as dark as they come. Recession. Oil shock. Global catastrophe. Oil prices spiked. The Dow and the Nasdaq both fell into correction territory. The S&P had its worst month since twenty twenty-two.

But it didn't stay that way. Since the market bottomed out in late March, the Dow has climbed back nearly nineteen percent. The S&P is up almost twenty-two percent. The Nasdaq has surged twenty-seven percent. And if you ask the people who actually watch this stuff for a living, they'll tell you exactly why. Michael Ashley Schulman, an investment strategist over at Cerity Partners, put it this way. Quote. So far, the global economy has pulled off the financial equivalent of a Mission Impossible scene. End quote. And when the International Monetary Fund put out its report in July, they said the global economy was being shaped by two forces pulling in opposite directions

at the same time. The war was dragging growth down. But enthusiasm over artificial intelligence was propping the whole thing back up.

Now sit with that for a second. The exact same AI boom that's got ranchers in New Mexico worried about their well water is the exact same force that's kept Wall Street from cratering during a war. Main Street is paying more for gas and groceries and plane tickets because of that war. Jet fuel alone is running about seventy percent higher than last year, according to the International Air Transport Association. Airlines have jacked up ticket prices, added fuel surcharges, and cut flights. Lufthansa alone slashed twenty thousand short-haul flights. Spirit Airlines, which had been struggling for years anyway, flat out disappeared. Main Street is footing that bill. But Wall Street, so far, is shrugging it off, because money is pouring into AI infrastructure faster than the war can drag the market down.

That is the exact same dynamic playing out in miniature in every one of these rural fights over data centers. Investors and tech giants get the upside. Communities get the water bill, the power bill, and the land grab. It's the same story at the national level and the local level. Somebody prospers, and somebody else pays for it.

Now go back to the ground level, because there's another layer to this fight that I haven't mentioned yet, and it's the electricity itself. These data centers don't just need land and water. They need a staggering, almost unbelievable amount of power to train and run these AI systems. And that demand has set off the single biggest construction boom in natural gas power plants this country has ever seen. Think about that. The same industry that Silicon Valley sells as clean, futuristic, cutting-edge technology is directly responsible for a wave of new gas plants getting built to keep the lights on.

That's put clean energy advocates in a bind, and they're fighting back state by state. Michigan, Oregon, and Minnesota all passed laws in the last eighteen months specifically to protect their existing rules requiring utilities to run on one hundred percent emissions-free power by twenty forty. California's got similar legislation working through the tail end of its session right now. And in Georgia, Colorado, and North Carolina, you've got environmental groups and big corporations that made their own clean energy

promises going toe to toe with the old monopoly utilities, the ones that have controlled the power grid for decades, trying to force them to change how they hook these data centers up.

So picture the full chain here. A tech company decides it needs a new AI computing complex. It goes looking for cheap rural land. It needs millions of gallons of water to cool the servers. It needs a small city's worth of electricity to run them. That electricity, more often than not, is coming from a brand new natural gas plant. And the community around all of it is left holding a higher water bill, a higher power bill, and a permanently changed landscape, while the profits flow to five companies headquartered thousands of miles away.

Now, not everybody on the ground is against this. I mentioned the building trades unions are all in on these projects, and that's not a small detail. Massive numbers of union tradesmen are working these sites right now. Union locals are scrambling to recruit new apprentices just to keep up with demand, and expanding their training centers to do it. National union leaders say their membership numbers are growing faster than anyone can remember. And the tech companies know it. They're pouring millions of dollars into training programs to keep that labor pipeline full, because without the union trades, none of these projects get built on schedule.

And here's the political piece of that. These unions aren't sitting on the sidelines. They're showing up to the same town council meetings where angry residents are lined up with complaints about water and noise and property values. And more often than not, it's a union representative standing up to answer those complaints, not some tech executive flown in from California. The companies themselves tend to go quiet at those meetings. The unions carry the water for them, so to speak, in the rooms that matter most, the local ones, where zoning boards and county commissions actually decide whether a project gets built.

So you've got this three-way tug of war happening in county after county. Rural landowners and environmentalists worried about water and farmland. Union tradesmen who need the jobs and are willing to defend the projects in public. And politicians caught in the middle, trying to figure out which way

the wind is actually blowing before the midterms hit. Some, like Governor Abbott in Texas, are trying to have it both ways, defending the industry's jobs while cracking down on the electric bill fallout. Others, like Governor Hochul in New York, have just hit pause entirely with that one-year ban.

And then there's Trump, sitting above all of it, treating this like a matter of beating China, not a matter of local zoning fights. He's not wrong that the stakes are real on that front. Whoever wins the AI race is going to have massive advantages in everything from military technology to the economy of the next fifty years. But that argument doesn't mean much to a rancher in Doña Ana County watching a well permit get approved without the public notice the law actually requires. National security and a family's water rights are both real. They just don't live in the same conversation very easily, and that's exactly why this fight has gotten so messy.

Here's my bottom line on this whole thing. Seven hundred billion dollars is getting shoveled into the ground this year to build machines that most Americans will never see and don't fully understand. Some of that money is going to build real jobs, and I'm not going to sit here and pretend union paychecks don't matter, because they do. But a lot of that money is also going to quietly reroute water away from farms, jack up electric bills for regular families, and pave over land that took generations to build up, all so a handful of companies in California and Washington State can win a race against China that most of us have no say in. When the ranchers and the environmentalists end up on the same side of a fight, that is not a fluke. That's a warning sign. And any candidate running this fall who doesn't have an answer for the family whose well just ran dry next to a half-built server farm is going to find out the hard way that this issue does not care what party you belong to.

We'll be right back.

09 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

10 — SEGMENT D: WHO WINS WHEN THE WORLD BURNS

Let me tell you who wins when the world burns. It is not you. It is not your neighbor. It is not the family trying to figure out how to pay for airline tickets to see their grandkids at Christmas. Six months ago, the United States and Israel opened up on Iran. Bombs started falling on February twenty-eighth. Smoke over Tehran. People clogging the roads trying to get out. Kids dying. And every serious economist in the country told you what was coming next. Surging oil. A worldwide recession. Economic catastrophe.

Well, here we are, six months later, and the catastrophe didn't happen. Not for everybody, anyway. It just depends who you are.

Let's start with the people who came out ahead. Wall Street panicked at first. I'll give you that. The Dow and the Nasdaq both went into correction. The S&P 500 had its worst month since 2002. That's the opening weeks of the war. Investors were spooked, oil was spiking, and it looked like the whole thing might spiral.

Then something happened that tells you everything about how this economy actually works. The market bottomed out in late March and turned around. Since then the Dow is up almost nineteen percent. The S&P is up almost twenty-two percent. The Nasdaq has surged twenty-seven percent. If those gains hold through the rest of the year, that's four straight years of gains for all three indexes. Michael Ashley Schulman, an investment strategist with Cerity Partners, put it this way. Quote. So far, the global economy has pulled off the financial equivalent of a Mission Impossible scene. End quote. The International Monetary Fund said in a July report that the economy is being pulled by two forces going in opposite directions at once. The war is a drag on growth. But the excitement over artificial intelligence is covering for it. So Main Street pays more at the pump. Wall Street shrugs and keeps climbing.

Now let's talk about who is not shrugging. Anybody who has to travel. Oil is the story here. Before the war, Brent crude closed around seventy-two dollars a barrel. During the fighting, with tankers barely moving through the

Strait of Hormuz, it spiked to nearly one hundred and twenty dollars a barrel. It has come down some since, but it is still running about twenty percent higher than before the war started. And oil touches everything. Crayons. Cosmetics. Anything made from petroleum. But it hits travelers hardest of all.

Jet fuel is expected to average seventy percent more this year than it did in 2025, according to the International Air Transport Association. Airlines didn't eat that cost. They passed it straight to you. Higher ticket prices. New baggage fees. Fuel surcharges stacked on top of everything else. And they cut flights while they were at it. Lufthansa Group alone canceled twenty thousand short-haul flights. Spirit Airlines, which had been limping along for years already, is gone. Evaporated. Brett House, an economist at Columbia University, said it plainly. Quote. The likelihood that fuel surcharges are going to be rolled back and airfares are going to be brought down is very low over the next few months. There is less choice for consumers and less competition between airlines, and therefore, less pressure to rein in fare increases. End quote. That's a nice way of saying you're stuck paying more and there's nobody left to shop around with.

Now here's a piece of this story that actually has a silver lining. The oil shock lit a fire under electric vehicles worldwide. Sales hit records in some countries. Singapore saw year-over-year EV growth of one hundred and ten percent. New Zealand hit one hundred and eighty percent. Colombia hit three hundred percent. Worldwide, the International Energy Agency projects EVs will make up twenty-nine percent of total vehicle sales this year, up from twenty-five percent last year. And that's even with the United States and China, the two biggest economies on the planet, actually seeing EV demand decline. Countries that depended heavily on Persian Gulf oil got the message fastest. Southeast Asian countries rolled out more renewable energy and started looking hard at nuclear power. African countries expanded domestic oil refining and sped up solar panel installation. A supply chain expert named Scott Lehmann, who works with a firm called Sphera, counted twenty-six countries and regions that have announced new clean energy or electrification measures directly because of this war. His quote stuck with me. Quote. The crisis is forcing investment faster than any policy framework

would have. End quote. So sometimes it takes a war to do what politicians wouldn't.

But here is where this story stops being about airfare and stock indexes and starts being about whether children eat. The Persian Gulf isn't just oil. It's fertilizer. And when the war shut down shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, fertilizer prices soared right along with crude. They peaked in April at forty-four percent higher than before the war, according to the World Bank's price index. That hit right as farmers around the world were making planting decisions for the season. Some of them cut back on fertilizer use to save money. A natural resources expert named Arif Gasilov, with the Gasilov Group consultancy, explained what that actually means down the road. Quote. If you're reducing your fertilizer usage right now, it's in a way borrowing against next year's soil health. End quote. In other words, this isn't just a bad year. It's a bad year that sets up another bad year.

The United Nations World Food Programme is warning that tens of millions of people could be pushed into hunger because of this. Carl Skau, the WFP's acting executive director, testified about it this week. He described what he called the suffocation of fertilizer exports hitting Asia and Africa hard. And it's not just the fertilizer. Higher shipping costs are making it harder for the World Food Programme itself to deliver food aid. Skau put it about as plainly as a man can. Quote. An oil tanker anchored in the Strait of Hormuz can mean one less meal a day for a child in Sudan. When oil prices go up, so does the price of flour, rice and vegetables. End quote. Think about that sentence for a second. A tanker sitting still in a strait eight thousand miles away, and a kid in Sudan doesn't eat that day. That's the real ledger of this war. Not the Dow. Not the Nasdaq. A kid's dinner.

Now let's get to the part of this story that ought to make your blood boil. While regular families are eating the cost of this war in jet fuel and grocery bills, and while children in Sudan and Somalia are going hungry because fertilizer got too expensive, the family of the man who is running this war has been cashing in.

Here's how. A military contractor called Powerus, which is about to go public with Eric Trump and Donald Trump Junior involved, landed an Air

Force contract worth as much as ninety million dollars to supply interceptors that shoot down Iranian drones. Don Junior also joined a private equity firm called 1789 Capital Management right after his father won reelection. That firm owns stakes in a whole list of military contractors that are profiting off this war. One of them, Anduril, got approval from the United States government to sell up to two billion dollars in drone interceptors to Kuwait. Another one, SpaceX, Elon Musk's company, is providing the satellite service that guides American drones against Iran. A third one, a rocket maker called Firehawk Defense, won Pentagon contracts to build propellants and warheads to restock America's dwindling supplies.

Now, a spokeswoman for 1789 Capital, Alexa Henning, said Don Junior had nothing to do with the decision to invest in those companies, so there's no, quote, nefarious connection, end quote. You can believe that if you want to.

But it doesn't stop with the sons. The president's own investment portfolio, managed by outside people, has been loading up on shares of American military suppliers that are doing well because of this war. Lockheed Martin. General Dynamics. Northrop Grumman. Democrats put out a report this week saying Trump's personal holdings in oil and gas stocks have jumped by as much as fifteen and a half million dollars since the war started. A White House spokeswoman named Anna Kelly said, quote, there are no conflicts of interest, end quote, and that the president, quote, only acts in the best interests of the American public, end quote.

I want you to sit with that for a second. This war has already cost the United States tens of billions of dollars. It's caused thousands of Iranian casualties. It's shaved an estimated hundreds of billions of dollars off projected global economic output. Farmers are cutting fertilizer. Children are going hungry in Sudan and Somalia. And the president's family is sitting on defense contracts and stock gains connected to the very war he ordered.

You don't have to believe in some grand conspiracy to see the problem here. Nobody is saying Donald Trump started a war to boost his stock portfolio. But once the war started, his family's businesses and his own investments happened to land right in the sweet spot. That is not a

coincidence you should feel comfortable with. That is a president whose family profits no matter what happens to the rest of us.

And here is the part that should tell you something about where the country actually stands on this. Even with the Dow up nineteen percent and defense stocks flying, this war is deeply unpopular with the American public. It could cost Trump and his party plenty in the midterms coming up in November. So his own finances are up. His family's businesses are up. And his political standing is down. Which tells you something important. Regular people can smell it even when they can't name every contract or every stock trade. They know when the guy at the top is doing fine while they're the ones paying for it at the pump, at the grocery store, and at the airport counter.

That's the story of this war in one sentence. The people who started it and the people connected to them are getting richer. The people who had nothing to do with it are the ones paying the bill. And somewhere in Sudan tonight, a mother is trying to figure out how to stretch one less meal across her family, because a tanker is sitting still in a strait none of us will ever see.

You don't have to look eight thousand miles away to find this same pattern. Look at what's happening right here at home, right now, to the way you vote.

The Postal Service is racing to build a computer system that could decide whether one out of every three voters in this country gets their mail ballot at all. This comes straight out of an executive order President Trump signed back in March. That order told the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and the Social Security Administration to build state-by-state citizenship lists. Then it told the Postal Service to only send mail ballots to voters who show up on those lists. Every ballot envelope has to meet new Postal Service rules and carry a bar code.

Here's the problem. A system like this normally takes a year or more to build properly. The Postal Service is trying to do it in three months. And they want it running in time for the midterm elections this November.

A whistleblower came forward and laid out exactly how sloppy this rush job has been. Democratic Senator Richard Blumenthal released the whistleblower's statement earlier this week. According to that statement, the

Postal Service started building this online portal on June fifteenth. Ten days later, on June twenty-fifth, a federal judge in Boston named Indira Talwani ordered them to stop. So they stopped. Then on July twenty-ninth, right when the administration appealed her ruling up to the Supreme Court, the Postal Service quietly started building again. The Supreme Court didn't strike down Judge Talwani's order until August twenty-fourth. Which means, according to the whistleblower, the Postal Service was building this thing in defiance of a court order for weeks. Judge Talwani herself found last week that the Postal Service violated her order. She didn't impose any sanctions. But she found it happened.

Now here's what they built, or tried to build, in that rushed window. A group called Whistleblower Aid put out a summary of what their source described. Quote. The apparently sloppy and rushed manner in which the Federal Ballot Mail Portal and supporting IT systems are being built poses significant risk. Potentially millions of American voters may not receive their mail-in ballot this election cycle in a timely manner, or at all. End quote.

And here's the part that ought to scare you regardless of which party you vote for. The whistleblower says the Postal Service built in what they're calling a zero percent rule. That means if there is a single scanning error anywhere in a batch of ballot envelopes, tens of thousands of them can get thrown out. Not just the one bad envelope. The whole batch. Every legitimate ballot sitting next to that one mistake. Election officials handle these ballots at a physical post office, they get scanned against a voter database, and there are three separate layers of checks. One error anywhere in that chain and, according to the whistleblower, the entire batch can be rejected.

Blumenthal didn't mince words about what this looks like. Quote. The Postal Service has designed a system to disenfranchise millions of Americans. End quote. He said that to reporters before he released the whistleblower's information. He went further. Quote. This administration seems hell-bent on changing the framework on casting ballots in this country clearly for political reasons. End quote.

Think about the timing here. Mail ballots are supposed to start going out in North Carolina this Friday. Election officials there have already warned

this portal cannot possibly be ready in time. On the night of August twenty-first, the Postal Service released its final rule saying it would only send ballots for states that got their envelope designs approved and submitted their voter list through this portal. A portal that, again, was not even active yet. That gave the plaintiffs a new opening to sue, and last Thursday night Judge Talwani issued a two-week restraining order blocking the whole thing. On Monday, she refused to lift that order, though she did say the Postal Service can keep building the portal as long as it isn't forcing states to use it yet.

Now let's be honest about the actual scale of the problem the administration says it's solving. A report from the Brookings Institution, published in 2025, found that mail voting fraud happens in about four cases out of every ten million ballots cast. Four. Out of ten million. That's the fraud problem this entire apparatus is supposedly built to stop. Meanwhile more than twenty-nine percent of all voters in 2024, nearly a third of the country, cast their ballot by mail. And it's worth remembering, mail voting used to be used equally by both parties in this country. It only became a partisan flashpoint after Trump turned against it in 2020, after he lost, and started blaming mail ballots for a defeat that every serious review found was fair. He's used mail ballots himself, more than once, while telling everybody else it's rigged.

Blumenthal says he has, quote, a very strong hope and some faith that our system of justice will strike down this unconstitutional and unconscionable rule, end quote. But he also said something every voter ought to hear. If this rule somehow survives and goes into effect for the midterms, his advice would be, don't vote by mail. Think about what that means. A sitting United States senator is telling people not to trust a voting method that nearly a third of the country relies on, because the federal government might have broken it on purpose or by sheer incompetence. Either one should bother you.

So who wins if this portal goes live half-built and starts rejecting ballots by the tens of thousands? Not the eighty-year-old veteran who votes by mail because getting to the polls is hard. Not the soldier stationed overseas. Not the single mother working a double shift on Election Day. The people who win

are the ones who get to decide, after the fact, whose votes count and whose don't.

And this same pattern, chaos rushed through, big winners and a lot of quiet losers, is playing out in your own backyard too, if your backyard happens to have open land and a power grid.

Data centers are going up everywhere in this country right now, and the money behind them is almost impossible to grasp. Oracle, Meta, Google, Amazon and Microsoft are planning to pour more than seven hundred billion dollars into data centers in the United States this year alone. Seven hundred billion, in one year, from five companies. Two years ago almost nobody outside the tech industry had even heard the term data center. Then ChatGPT launched in late 2022 and the whole world wanted a piece of generative AI, and generative AI eats electricity and land for breakfast.

So these companies went looking for space, and they found it in rural America. In New Mexico, Oracle and OpenAI are building something called Project Jupiter, a one hundred and sixty-five billion dollar data center complex going up near the Mexican border. It needs millions of gallons of water in a state already hammered by drought. The Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental group, is challenging the state's approval of well-drilling permits for that project, saying New Mexico ignored its own public notification laws. A water rights lawyer named Samantha Barncastle Salopek, who comes from a pecan-farming family, is now running as a Republican for a county commission seat in Doña Ana County specifically because farmers and ranchers are worried sick about their water rights. That's a conservative farming family and a left-leaning environmental group landing on the same side of an argument. That doesn't happen often in this country anymore, and when it does, you should pay attention to why.

President Trump, to his credit or not depending on your view, is not backing down from data centers even as politicians in both parties run from them. He said recently that if he were a mayor or a governor with a shot at landing a big data center, quote, I would absolutely want it, because the jobs are enormous and the money paid, the taxes paid, are just enormous, end quote. He also admitted the industry needs, quote, a little public relations

help, end quote. That's Trump's own words, and he's not wrong that it needs help, given what's happening in these communities.

But governors who used to chase these projects are now backing away. Texas Governor Greg Abbott ordered regulators to make sure Texans aren't paying higher electric bills to subsidize data centers, and he's promising to push legislation next year stripping away the state's billion-dollar-a-year tax break for them. New York Governor Kathy Hochul went further and ordered a full one-year ban on large data centers in her state.

Meanwhile the one group still cheering loudly for every one of these projects is organized labor. Building trades unions are working these sites in huge numbers, union locals are scrambling to recruit apprentices to keep up with demand, and national union leaders say their membership is growing faster than they've ever seen. Tech giants are pouring millions into training programs to keep that pipeline full. When a town holds a packed council meeting to fight a data center, it's often union members, not tech executives, who show up to answer the complaints.

So look at the pattern across every one of these stories tonight. A war overseas that Wall Street rides to record highs while a mother in Sudan skips a meal. A voting system rushed through in defiance of a federal judge that could strip ballots from the same people who've relied on the mail for decades. A data center boom worth seven hundred billion dollars a year that's pitting pecan farmers against billion-dollar tech companies over the water under their own feet. In every single one of these stories, the money and the power find a way to come out ahead. It's the rest of us who get stuck holding the bill, waiting on a ballot that might never come, or watching the well run dry.

That's the honest state of the country right now. The fires keep getting bigger. And the people setting them keep getting richer.

We'll be right back.

11 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

12 — CLOSING / SIGN-OFF

That is the show for tonight.

Look at what we covered. The Postal Service loses money hand over fist, and the fix is always higher stamp prices, never a manager losing his job. Sanctuary city politicians make a promise to protect people, and when it blows up, they are nowhere to be found, but the family down the block is the one living with the consequences. The data center developers get the tax breaks and the water rights, and your electric bill goes up to cover it, while regulators scramble after the fact to make them pay their own way. And the war machine keeps writing checks to defense contractors, and this time some of those checks are landing right in the president's own family's pocket, while the guy who signed up because he believed in his country is the one who pays the real price.

You start to see the pattern. It is the same story wearing a different hat every night. The people who run these systems, whether it is a federal agency, a city government, a tech company, or the Pentagon, they build in protection for themselves first. Somebody else absorbs the cost. Somebody else takes the risk. Somebody else cleans up the mess. That somebody is usually you.

I do not say that to make you angry and leave you there. I say it because seeing the pattern is the first step to doing something about it. You cannot fix what you refuse to look at straight.

I appreciate you spending this hour with me. There are a hundred other things you could be doing tonight, and you chose to listen to a plain-spoken guy from Ford Oil talk about what is really going on. That means something to me. Do not take it for granted, because I do not take you for granted.

We will be back tomorrow night at seven o'clock, same station, same time, same straight talk.

Until then, take care of your family, keep your eyes open, and do not let anybody tell you the mess is normal.

I'm Mark Ford. Good night, America.