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The People's Hour

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SOURCES CARTEL GUNFIRE: Coast Guard Forces Return Fire After Attacked on Border, A federal law banned noncitizen voting in 1996. A Biden judge just called it unconstitutional, America Added 29,000 Jobs in September, Unemployment Ticked Up to 4.2%, Europe diesel release won't have much impact on US prices, experts say: 'At most a few pennies', Exclusive: Army creates autonomy command amid Hegseth's robo-warfare push

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Auto-built by news_picker. Source headlines:

- [Breitbart] CARTEL GUNFIRE: Coast Guard Forces Return Fire After Attacked on Border

<https://www.breitbart.com/border/2026/10/02/cartel-gunfire-coast-guard-forces-return-fire-after-attack-on-texas-border-u-s-army-to-deploy-in-response/>

Why: American forces were shot at on the Texas border and the Army is deploying in response. This is a border security story about cartels and the safety of those who serve, and it is not an abstract debate.

- [Washington Times] A federal law banned noncitizen voting in 1996. A Biden judge just called it unconstitutional

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2026/oct/2/federal-judge-rules-congress-cant-ban-noncitizens-voting/>

Why: A court ruling that Congress can't ban noncitizen voting hits election integrity and immigration right before the midterms. The audience will want to know who is behind the ruling and what happens next.

- [Breitbart] America Added 29,000 Jobs in September, Unemployment Ticked Up to 4.2%

<https://www.breitbart.com/economy/2026/10/02/america-added-29000-jobs-in-september-unemployment-ticked-up-to-4-2/>

Why: Only 29,000 jobs added and unemployment rising is a hard look at what working families are facing. It raises the question of whether the economy is delivering for ordinary workers heading into the midterms.

- [New York Post] Europe diesel release won't have much impact on US prices, experts say: 'At most a few pennies'

<https://nypost.com/2026/10/02/business/europe-diesel-release-wont-have-much-impact-on-us-prices-experts/>

Why: The G7 is releasing diesel and crude reserves, but experts say American truckers, farmers and drivers will see only pennies of relief. That lets the host ask who is really paying for energy instability tied to the Iran conflict.

- [Axios] Exclusive: Army creates autonomy command amid Hegseth's robo-warfare push

<https://www.axios.com/2026/10/02/army-autonomy-command-hegseth-agincourt>

Why: The Army is standing up a new command for autonomous weapons, which raises questions about the future of soldiers' jobs, AI accountability and what taxpayers are buying. Military families and veterans will have strong views on robots replacing troops.

01 — OPENER JINGLE

[STING — markford_open.mp3]

02 — COLD OPEN (DATE SLATE + ROADMAP)

Good evening, America. It's Friday, October second, two thousand twenty-six, and this is The Mark Ford Show and good grief we have a show for you tonight.

It's been a week where the headlines say one thing and the facts underneath say another. So tonight we're going to dig under a few of them. Four stories, and every one of them touches your life more than the people in charge would like to admit.

First, the Rio Grande. A Coast Guard crew on patrol near Garceno, Texas, took gunfire from the Mexican side of the river. They returned fire, and thank God nobody on our side was hurt. Army troops from West Texas are now headed to the Rio Grande Valley for at least thirty days. Americans have been getting shot at from across that water since twenty fourteen, and I want to know why the cartels still act like the river belongs to them.

Second, the jobs report. The economy added twenty nine thousand jobs in September. Economists were looking for eighty five thousand. Unemployment ticked up to four point two percent, and the numbers from earlier months got revised down. Read that way, it's ugly. But look at who's in the unemployment number. Nearly half a million people came into the labor force looking for work, and that's not the same as layoffs. With fewer immigrants arriving and Baby Boomers heading for the exits, the number of jobs we need each month may be a lot closer to zero than anybody wants to say out loud. We'll go through what that means for your paycheck and for the Federal Reserve.

Third, your fuel bill. The G7 agreed to release one hundred million barrels of diesel and crude, and Europe is patting itself on the back for it. The experts say the effect on American prices could be a few pennies, because

that much oil is about one day of global demand. Meanwhile our own Strategic Petroleum Reserve sits near two hundred eighty three million barrels, the lowest since the nineteen eighties. Gas is four dollars and forty cents. Diesel is six thirty seven. Diesel is what moves the groceries on every truck in this country, and winter heating is coming. There's talk of an executive order on red-dyed diesel, there's a war with Iran, and there's the Strait of Hormuz. All of it lands on an election year, and we'll walk through the politics.

Fourth, the Army is building a command for robot warfare. It's called the Futures and Autonomous Systems Command, FASCOM for short, and it comes with a new portfolio acquisition executive just for autonomy. It follows Secretary Hegseth's Meridian and Agincourt projects. Autonomy is going into at least six formations, including aviation, armor, and sustainment, and the drone specialties are opening up to every unit that can use them. We saw what drones did in Eastern Europe. The question for tonight is whether the Pentagon can finally cut through its own red tape and put this hardware in the hands of soldiers while it still matters.

That's the lineup. Gunfire on the border, a jobs number that needs a second look, a fuel gesture that won't reach your pump, and an Army getting ready for a different kind of fight. I'm Mark Ford, and I'm going to give it to you straight, the way I always do.

This is The People's Hour, on The Mark Ford Show, right here on WRZF.

03 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

04 — SEGMENT A: SHOTS ACROSS THE RIO GRANDE

Last Saturday, September twenty sixth, a United States Coast Guard crew was out on the Rio Grande in a small boat, doing the job we send them to do.

They were near a place called Garceno, Texas. They were working a joint interdiction operation with federal partners, and those partners included U.S. Border Patrol agents. It was a routine patrol on the river that separates this country from Mexico. Then somebody on the Mexican side opened fire on them.

Let that sink in for a second. American service members, in an American boat, on a border river, got shot at. Nobody had provoked anything. They were not on the other bank. They were patrolling. And the people shooting at them are suspected to be Mexican cartel forces.

The Coast Guard crew did what you would want them to do. They returned fire. They suppressed the threat. The shooting stopped, and everybody went home.

Here is what we know officially. The Coast Guard put out a statement through spokesperson Lieutenant Commander Rachel Ault, and Breitbart Texas got it. Commander Ault said, quote, "No injuries to Coast Guard or other personnel were reported, and no damage to Coast Guard assets or equipment was reported." End quote. She added that federal authorities take all threats against military and law enforcement personnel extremely seriously, and that the investigation remains active.

So the good news comes first. Nobody was hurt. Nobody was killed. The boat is fine. The crew is fine. Thank God for that, and thank those Guardsmen for keeping their heads in the middle of a firefight on a river.

But I want you to notice how this story got out. It did not come from a press conference. It did not come from the White House podium or a Coast Guard briefing room. NewsNation national correspondent Ali Bradley first reported the shooting, along with a planned military deployment. And then it got scrutiny on social media, with community notes popping up on X. That tells you something about the climate we live in. An attack on American forces on our own border is breaking news, and the first thing a lot of people do is go looking for a reason to doubt it.

Now, the deployment. A Department of Homeland Security source familiar with the operational response told Breitbart Texas that U.S. Army troops, who

were previously assigned to border operations in West Texas, are expected to move to the Rio Grande Valley. The source described it as a direct force-protection countermeasure after the attack. In plain English, somebody shot at our people, so we are sending more of our people to stand between the shooters and the rest of the Valley.

How long? The troops are expected to remain staged in the Rio Grande Valley sector for at least thirty days. At least. That is a floor, not a ceiling. How many troops? Nobody is saying. The exact size and duration of the unit deployment remain undisclosed, and the stated reason is operational security. I understand that. You do not hand a cartel a headcount. But it does mean the public is being asked to take this on faith for now.

Breitbart Texas also reached out to the Department of War Joint Task Force Southern Border for details on the unit's size and mission. Officials did not respond before publication. So we have a source at Homeland Security, we have a Coast Guard statement, and we have a silence from the people who would actually run the mission. That silence is not a scandal. But it is worth noting.

The Department of Homeland Security did put out an official statement, and it is worth reading. It says, quote, "The Coast Guard works closely with U.S. Border Patrol, the Department of War and the Texas Military Division to secure the border, disrupt illicit activity and protect the American people. We will continue to leverage a layered, integrated approach to control, secure, and defend the border that strengthens our collective ability to counter illicit activity and safeguard our personnel and the communities we serve." End quote.

That is a mouthful. Strip out the bureaucratic language and you get the real message. The Coast Guard, the Border Patrol, the Army, and the Texas Military Division are all working the same river. That is four different forces on one stretch of water. And the fact that you need all of them tells you how seriously the other side takes that river.

Because here is the part that should bother you most. This is not new. If you think this is some sudden flare-up, you have not been paying attention.

Gunfire from the Mexican side of the Rio Grande is not uncommon. It has been happening for years, and it has been reported for years.

Go back to June of two thousand fourteen. Brandon Darby of Breitbart Texas reported that U.S. law enforcement officers took gunfire near Rincon Village, just south of Mission, Texas. Who was being shot at? Texas Parks and Wildlife game wardens. These were wardens that then Governor Rick Perry had deployed to help secure the border. The shots were reportedly fired with the intent to harass them. Think about that word, harass. Somebody on the other bank decided it was a good idea to shoot at game wardens just to let them know who was in charge of the river.

About two years after that, Ildefonso Ortiz, also of Breitbart, reported on another incident. A Texas Department of Public Safety trooper and a U.S. Border Patrol agent were hit by a stray bullet fired from the Mexican side of the Rio Grande. That was near Miguel Aleman, Tamaulipas. The trooper took a gunshot wound to his leg. The agent was unharmed, and the reason was his protective gear. A vest was the difference between an injury and something much worse.

Then more recently, Mexican cartel gunmen opened fire on Border Patrol agents in the Rio Grande Valley Sector. Those agents were not on a boat. They were conducting aerial surveillance. They were up in the air, and people on the ground still thought it was a good idea to shoot at them.

So let's line it up. Game wardens in twenty fourteen. A state trooper and a federal agent about two years later. Border Patrol agents in the air. And now a Coast Guard boat crew last Saturday. Different decades, different agencies, different vehicles. Same river. Same result. Somebody on the far bank pulls a trigger and an American takes cover.

Now I want to be fair about one thing, because the record is mixed on motive. In the Miguel Aleman case, the report said it was a stray bullet. Not every round that crosses that river is aimed at a person. Some of it may be cartel gunmen fighting each other, and some of it lands where it should not. The source material itself says that. But when the source says the crew in this latest case sustained an unprovoked attack, and when the earlier case with

the game wardens was described as fired with the intent to harass, you start to see a pattern that is hard to wave away as accident.

The source for much of this history comes from Randy Clark, who is no cable news talker. He is a thirty two year veteran of the United States Border Patrol. Before he retired, he served as the Division Chief for Law Enforcement Operations. He directed operations for nine Border Patrol stations in the Del Rio, Texas, sector. That is a man who has stood on that riverbank and knows what it looks like. And when someone with that background writes that gunfire from across the Rio Grande is not uncommon, I believe him. He is joined in the byline by Bob Price, associate editor and senior news contributor for the Breitbart Texas border team.

So now the question that I think matters. Why does this keep happening?

The honest answer is that the cartels believe they can get away with it. They treat that river like it is theirs. They treat the crossing points like toll booths and the banks like their own back yard. When American crews show up, the cartels see an intrusion, and sometimes they answer with bullets. Those cartels did not get that confident overnight. They got there by watching for years as shots across the river brought nothing but a press release.

Look at the pattern of response. Game wardens get shot at in twenty fourteen, and the story runs for a day or two. A trooper takes a bullet in the leg, and the story runs for a day or two. Agents get fired on from the ground while flying overhead, and it runs for a day or two. Meanwhile the men with the guns on the other side have all the time in the world to learn that the cost is low.

I am not saying we need to cross the river with guns blazing. I am saying a country has to be able to protect its own people on its own border without apologizing for it. When a Coast Guard crew returns fire at people who shot first, that is not escalation. That is self defense. It is the exact thing any of us would expect our own sons and daughters in uniform to do.

And I will say this about the deployment. Sending Army troops from West Texas into the Rio Grande Valley is the right kind of response in principle. If

somebody shoots at your people, you put more strength behind them. You do not pull back. You do not wait for the next one to land. Force protection is a real military concept, and it exists for exactly this kind of moment.

But I have questions, and so should you. Thirty days is a short window. A cartel that has been testing American patience for twelve years is not going to change its mind in thirty days. The shooters will still be on the other side when the troops are gone, unless the policy behind the deployment is built to last. A deployment can be a shield, but it cannot be a strategy by itself.

Think about who is standing in the middle of all this. The Coast Guard crew was on a small boat. The Border Patrol agents were beside them. Those are people who show up every day, work long shifts in hard country, and go home to families in the Valley. They do not set the policy. They carry it out. When the policy is weak, they are the ones who stand on the water and take the rounds.

And the communities along that river are living with this too. The DHS statement talks about safeguarding, quote, "the communities we serve." End quote. Those communities are the families in Starr County, Hidalgo County, and the small towns up and down the bank. They have heard the gunfire. They know what a cartel looks like. They do not need a lecture from someone in a nice office a thousand miles away.

There is another thing I find telling. Look at how many agencies are named in that one DHS statement. The Coast Guard, Border Patrol, the Department of War, and the Texas Military Division. That is a lot of moving parts. Layered and integrated is how they put it. Fine. Layers are good, as long as one of them is actually in charge and the whole thing is aimed at a result you can measure. Otherwise it is just more letterhead.

The measure is simple. Can an American crew patrol the Rio Grande without getting shot at? Not without a gunfight, not without a backup plan. Can they just do the job? That is the standard. By that standard, last Saturday was a failure of deterrence, even though the crew handled it well.

And let me say something about the people who rushed to question this report. I understand a healthy skepticism. Reporters and readers should

check things. That is fair, and a community note is not a crime. But when your first instinct to an attack on American service members is to look for the hole in the story, you have to ask yourself what you are really protecting. The Coast Guard confirmed it. The Coast Guard gave a date, a place, and an account of what happened. It said there were no injuries and no damage. It said the investigation is active. That is a government agency putting its name on a statement.

So here is where we stand. An unprovoked attack on a Coast Guard crew. A swift return of fire. No injuries. A deployment of Army troops for at least thirty days, with the details held back for security. And a long record, stretching back to June of twenty fourteen, of Americans being shot at from the Mexican side of that river.

If you live in Texas, none of this is abstract. If you live in Ohio or Oregon, it still reaches you, because what crosses that river does not stay on the riverbank. The same networks that shoot at boat crews move product, move people, and move money. They do it because they believe the river belongs to them.

That belief is the real problem. Troops can answer one attack. Statements can calm one news cycle. Only a government that makes the cost of shooting at Americans higher than the reward will change what the cartels think. Until then, the next crew that heads out onto the Rio Grande is counting on their training, their body armor, and a little luck, and that is not a border policy worth bragging about.

We'll be right back.

05 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

06 — SEGMENT B: TWENTY NINE THOUSAND JOBS AND WHAT THE NUMBER REALLY SAYS

Twenty nine thousand jobs. That's the number out this morning for September. Wall Street was looking for eighty five thousand. The unemployment rate was supposed to hold at four point one percent, and it ticked up to four point two. If you only read the headline, you'd think the economy just stumbled. Cable news will run with that for about six hours.

I want to walk through what's actually in that report, because the headline and the guts of it tell two different stories. Some of it is bad. Some of it is not what it looks like. And one piece of it changes how we should think about every jobs number from here on out.

Start with the bad. The revisions. July was first reported as a gain of twenty one thousand jobs. It's now recorded as a loss of ten thousand. That's a month we were told was growing and was actually shrinking. August got cut too, from a gain of one hundred and sixty two thousand down to one hundred and thirty three thousand. That's twenty nine thousand jobs shaved off, which happens to be the same number as this month's headline. Funny how that works.

That's the thing about these reports. The first number is a guess. The real number shows up weeks later, quietly, after the cameras have moved on. So when somebody tells you a jobs report is a triumph or a disaster on day one, keep in mind they're reading a rough draft.

Now look inside the twenty nine thousand. The private sector added forty six thousand jobs. That's the part of the economy where people make things, sell things, and fix things. It's stronger than the headline. So what dragged the total down? Government. Government payrolls shrank by seventeen thousand. Forty six thousand minus seventeen thousand, and you get twenty nine thousand. That's the whole gap.

I'm not going to shed a tear over that one. When private employers are hiring and government payrolls are shrinking, that's a healthy direction for the people paying the bills. Every government job comes out of a taxpayer's

pocket. The private sector job is the one that pays for it. If the mix is tilting toward the people creating value, I'll take that trade.

Let's break the private side down. Goods-producing industries added eighteen thousand jobs. That's durable goods manufacturing and construction, the folks who build the things and then build the places to put them. The services side of the economy added twenty eight thousand. Add those together and you land on the forty six thousand private sector number. So the hiring wasn't some fluke in one corner. It was spread across the real economy, with factories and construction sites showing up in the mix.

Now to the number everybody is going to get wrong. Unemployment went from four point one to four point two percent. The natural reaction is that people got laid off. They didn't. This is the part of the report I'd put on a billboard.

The labor force expanded by four hundred and eighty five thousand people in September. Nearly half a million Americans either started looking for work or came back to look for it. The labor force participation rate rose by two tenths of a percentage point. When somebody who wasn't looking for a job starts looking, and hasn't landed one yet, the government counts them as unemployed. That's what pushed the rate up. The report says it directly. The small rise in unemployment came from people entering the labor force, not from people losing jobs.

Think about what that means. If I'm sitting on the couch and I decide I want to work, the unemployment rate goes up. That's not a sign the economy is collapsing. That's a sign that people think there's something out there worth going after. Folks don't come off the sidelines when they think the game is over. They come off the sidelines when they think they've got a shot.

A rising unemployment rate caused by layoffs is a warning light. A rising unemployment rate caused by more people trying to get in is a different animal. I'd rather see half a million people lean in than half a million people give up.

Now the big one. The reason the old rules are broken. For years, economists and reporters have carried around a mental scoreboard. If the

economy adds one hundred thousand jobs or more a month, things are good. If it adds less than that, things are weak. That scoreboard was built for a different country, and that country had a different population trend.

The measuring stick that matters is called the break-even rate. It's how many jobs the economy has to add each month just to keep unemployment from rising. Think of it like a treadmill. If the belt is moving fast, you've got to run fast to stay in place. If the belt slows down, you can walk and still stay put.

From twenty twenty one through twenty twenty four, immigration was running at much higher levels. That meant a flood of new workers entering the labor force every single month. Back then, the economy needed to add more than one hundred thousand jobs a month just to keep pace. A hundred thousand jobs and the unemployment rate sits still. Less than that, and it rises.

That treadmill has slowed down. Immigration is down sharply, and the labor force isn't growing the way it did. On top of that, the Baby Boom generation keeps retiring. Millions of people who've worked their whole lives are leaving the workforce, and the generations behind them are smaller and aren't fully filling the gap. Every retirement party is a subtraction from the labor force.

So what's the new break-even number? Economists don't agree, and I respect anybody who admits they're unsure. Some now estimate it may be as low as zero. Others put it somewhere between ten thousand and fifty five thousand jobs a month. Even the high end of that range is far below the old hundred thousand mark. That means some months are likely to show negative payroll numbers without unemployment going up at all.

Read that again in plain English. We could see a month where the economy loses jobs on paper, and it wouldn't mean joblessness is growing. That's not spin. It's arithmetic. If fewer people are available to work, you need fewer new jobs to employ the ones who are.

So when you hear that twenty nine thousand is anemic, ask the question. Anemic compared to what? Compared to a period when we were importing

workers at a record pace? Under today's conditions, economists say numbers that look weak next to recent years may actually point to healthy, even robust, growth. A twenty nine thousand job gain, in a world where break-even might be near zero or at most fifty five thousand, isn't a disaster. It's a labor market adjusting to a smaller pool of workers.

I'm not going to tell you everything is rosy. Revisions went the wrong direction. Two months of data got worse after the fact. Hiring is slow. If you're a young person looking for your first real job, a low break-even rate isn't much comfort when the postings aren't there. A report can be technically healthy and still feel lousy at the kitchen table. Both things can be true.

But here's the part that matters for regular working people. When the supply of workers tightens, the worker gets leverage. An employer who can't find anybody has to pay more, offer better hours, and treat people better to keep them. That's how wages go up in the real world. Not because a politician announced it. Because the boss ran out of other options. For two decades, the cheap labor pipeline worked in one direction, and that was toward employers. If that pipeline narrows, the person doing the work has a stronger hand. That's one of the least-discussed results of this shift, and it's one that deserves more attention than it gets.

Now let's talk about the Federal Reserve, because this report landed at a very awkward moment for them. The Fed meets again later this month. Investors are on edge about whether the central bank will raise interest rates for a second time or hold them where they are. Raise rates, and everything that runs on borrowed money gets more expensive. Car loans, credit cards, business loans, mortgages. Hold, and you give the economy room to breathe.

On the surface, weak job growth gives the Fed a reason to be patient. A soft jobs number says there's no need to hit the brakes harder. Some policymakers will look at twenty nine thousand versus eighty five thousand and conclude that the economy is cooling and they can afford to wait before tightening again. That's the argument, and it'll be made.

But here's where the break-even debate cuts the other way. If the economy only needs a few thousand jobs a month to stay balanced, then twenty nine thousand isn't cooling at all. It may be right in the pocket. Private employers added forty six thousand. The labor force grew by nearly half a million. Participation went up. If you're a central banker who sees that, you might not read weakness. You might read an economy that's perfectly able to take another rate hike.

So the Fed has to decide which story to believe. Is this a labor market that's softening, or a labor market that has simply gotten smaller and tighter by design? Those two readings lead to opposite decisions. And the people making that call are working with revised numbers that were wrong two months running.

That's the uncomfortable truth about steering the entire economy off a monthly estimate that gets rewritten later. July was supposed to be a gain and turned out to be a loss. August was supposed to be strong and got trimmed. If the data keeps shifting after the fact, the Fed is driving by looking in the rearview mirror, and the mirror keeps getting repainted.

For regular people, the stakes are simple. If the Fed raises rates a second time on the strength of a belief that this economy is running hot, and that belief turns out to be wrong, the people who pay for it are the ones carrying a variable-rate balance, the small business owner trying to finance a truck, and the young couple trying to get a mortgage. If the Fed holds and the economy is fine, nobody gets hurt. The cost of waiting is low. The cost of a mistake in the other direction is high. Patience is the cheaper error.

The bigger lesson is about how we judge the economy at all. Politicians on both sides love a single number. They'll grab twenty nine thousand and either wave it as proof of failure or wave it away. Don't let either of them do your thinking. The number only means something when you know what it's being compared to. And we're in a new era where the comparison has changed.

Fewer new workers are coming in. More older workers are heading out. The pool is smaller, so the pace of hiring needed to stay even is smaller too. That's a structural change, not a one-month blip, and it's going to show up in

report after report. Some months will look terrible on paper. Some may even print a negative number. If you panic every time, you'll be wrong a lot.

So here's my read. The headline says twenty nine thousand and a rising unemployment rate. The substance says private hiring beat the headline, government shrank, and nearly half a million people jumped back into the labor force looking for work. The rate went up because people came off the sidelines, not because people got fired. And the old yardstick of one hundred thousand jobs a month belongs to a country that no longer exists.

Is it a booming economy? No. Is it the collapse the headline suggests? Also no. It's an economy with a smaller workforce, a shrinking public payroll, and workers who just got a little more bargaining power. The only people who should be nervous are the ones at the Fed, who have to guess which of those stories is true, and the ones who spent years counting on cheap, endless labor to keep wages down.

We'll be right back.

07 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

08 — SEGMENT C: EUROPE'S DIESEL GESTURE AND YOUR PUMP

Europe blinked today. After weeks of pressure from President Trump, the G7 agreed to open the vaults and release oil from emergency stockpiles. French President Emmanuel Macron made the announcement. The seven nations are the United States, France, Italy, Germany, Japan, Britain and Canada, and they agreed to release one hundred million barrels of diesel and crude. If you've been watching the numbers at the pump and wondering when somebody was going to do something, you might think this is it. It isn't.

Here is how it works. The International Energy Agency will coordinate the release. Macron said none of the countries involved will, quote, restrict the exchange of energy and petroleum products between partner countries, end quote. That line matters more than it sounds. President Trump had floated a ban on American diesel exports. That would have been a disaster for Europe, which is doubly dependent on us right now. The G7 deal took that idea off the table, according to the statement released today. So Europe gets its stockpile release and keeps its access to American fuel. Trump gets a headline. Posting on Truth Social, he said the release includes, quote, a massive amount, end quote, of Europe's diesel stockpiles.

Now let's talk about what it does for you. Joe Adamski is managing director of ProcureAbility, a supply chain consultancy. He told The New York Post that because America produces the vast majority of the diesel it uses every year, the effect on our prices would be, quote, at most a few pennies of change, end quote. A few pennies. That's the expert read on the big European gesture.

Think about why. Europe is where the pain is worst. European diesel is running near the equivalent of eight dollars a gallon. Europe gets most of its fuel from the Middle East and Russia, and both of those supply lines are a mess. The Iran war has choked the Strait of Hormuz. Ukrainian drones have been hitting Russian refineries, and Russia has responded by hoarding what it has. So Europe is stuck, and it leans harder on American barrels. This release helps Europeans first. It might shave a few dollars off the global price of oil, because oil is a global market. But the diesel you buy in Ohio or Texas comes mostly from refineries in this country.

Nic Puckrin is a cross-asset analyst and founder of Coin Bureau. He gave the fairest take I've seen. He said the US is clearly expecting some impact, quote, because the diesel market is global, easing pressure on supply in Europe does affect the wider market, end quote. He's right about that. Supply anywhere touches price everywhere. But he also warned that the size of the impact could be smaller than Americans are expecting. And he put the whole thing in a sentence I wish more politicians would read. Quote: The

government is trying to solve a supply crunch with temporary measures and dipping into reserves. That's a temporary fix at best. End quote.

Now put the size of this thing in perspective. One hundred million barrels sounds enormous. It is not. The total release equals about one day of global oil demand. One day. The whole planet burns through that much oil every twenty-four hours. And the G7 hasn't even said how much of it each country will contribute. So we are celebrating a one-day cushion that hasn't been divided up yet.

This isn't the first time we've been down this road. Back in March, the International Energy Agency coordinated a release of four hundred million barrels from strategic reserves. Four times what we got today. And what happened to prices? Gasoline still soared past four dollars a gallon. Diesel shot past six. That tells you the stockpile trick has already been tried at four times the size, and the pump didn't care.

It also cost us something. The US Strategic Petroleum Reserve now sits at roughly two hundred and eighty three million barrels. That is the lowest level since the nineteen eighties. That reserve exists for real emergencies, the kind where the country needs fuel and can't get it. We've been spending it down to manage the price of a gallon of gas before an election. Earlier this week, the administration offered to release the last forty million barrels from that March deal. Adamski says the best case for that is a ten cent drop in gasoline. He says three to five cents is more likely. So we're draining the national savings account to buy you a nickel.

Look at where prices stand right now. The national average for gasoline hit four dollars and forty cents a gallon today. Last week it was four dollars and forty-nine cents. Diesel is at six dollars and thirty-seven cents, down from six dollars and fifty. So yes, prices have eased a little. Nine cents on gas, thirteen cents on diesel. I'm not going to pretend that's nothing. But diesel was averaging three dollars and seventy cents a gallon this time last year. It's up better than seventy percent. Easing off the peak is not the same as relief.

And diesel is the one that matters, because diesel runs the economy. It powers the heavy trucks. Nearly everything you buy got there on one. Food,

clothes, furniture, and yes, even the regular gasoline at the station gets hauled around by diesel. When a trucking company pays two dollars and sixty-seven cents more per gallon than it did a year ago, that cost doesn't vanish. It goes into the freight rate, then into the wholesale price, then onto the shelf. That's how a fuel problem turns into a grocery bill. You won't see a line item on your receipt that says diesel surcharge. You'll just see the price of eggs, bread and chicken, and wonder when it got so high.

Diesel is also heating oil. Refined fuel heats a lot of American homes, especially in the Northeast. We are heading into October. Winter is coming, and if these prices hold, people are going to open heating bills that make last year's look cheap. Those on fixed incomes and those in older homes with oil furnaces are the ones who get hit first and hardest.

So what is the White House thinking about next? Reuters reported today that Trump may sign an executive order as early as next week to bring diesel prices down. One option on the table is allowing widespread use of red-dyed diesel. Here's what that is. It is chemically the same as regular diesel. The only difference is the dye. It's dyed red so inspectors can tell it's tax-exempt. That fuel is made for off-road equipment, like tractors and construction machines, and it's banned from public roads. The idea would be to let trucks run on it, skipping the road taxes and cutting the price at the pump.

I understand why they'd consider it. Taxes are part of what you pay. But think about what that means. It would be a tax holiday done through a loophole, and the road taxes on diesel exist to pay for roads. Cut them and you either find the money somewhere else or the potholes get worse. It's also a temporary patch. And the people who sell and enforce fuel tax rules have spent decades keeping red diesel off the highway on purpose. I want to see the details of what's actually signed before I judge it. But don't mistake a tax trick for a supply fix.

The experts have an even bigger warning. They say changes like these could cut gasoline prices by thirty to forty cents right away. Thirty to forty cents is real money if you fill a tank every week. But those same experts say the effect would be temporary, because refiners would eventually move their production elsewhere. In other words, if you mess with the market too hard,

the companies that make the fuel go where the money is. Then you're back where you started, with less domestic capacity than before.

So what is the permanent solution? The same experts agree on this one, and it has nothing to do with Europe's stockpile. It's ending the war in Iran. That war has effectively blockaded the Strait of Hormuz and disrupted global energy supplies for seven months. Seven months. A huge share of the world's oil moves through that narrow waterway. When it's choked, every country that buys oil pays for it. Adamski put it bluntly. Quote: Until we get back to a point of getting the Strait of Hormuz reopened, getting the Red Sea reopened and stabilized, we're going to continue to see disruptions. End quote. No release, no executive order, and no dye can substitute for open shipping lanes.

Which brings us to the politics. Last night, Trump said Iran, quote, is ready to fold up, end quote. He said he believes the US will win the war, quote, right after the election, end quote. Read that again. Right after the election. He also said US strikes against Iran might resume right after the November midterms. So the message to the American driver is that relief is coming, just not until after you vote. Meanwhile, Trump and other Republican leaders are eager to push gas and diesel prices down before the midterms. That's why you're seeing the reserve releases and the executive order talk and the pressure on Europe. Everybody in Washington knows what a six dollar diesel number does to an incumbent party in the fall.

I don't blame any politician for wanting lower prices. That's their job. But there's a difference between lowering prices and managing headlines. A gesture from Europe that amounts to one day of global demand is a headline. A reserve drained to its lowest point in about forty years for a few cents is a headline. A tax trick that disappears when the refiners adjust is a headline. None of them touches the real problem, which sits in the Strait of Hormuz, and by the president's own timeline that problem waits until after the ballots are counted.

So here's what regular people can do with this. Don't expect the pump to fall off a cliff next week. Plan for groceries to stay stubborn, because trucking costs are baked in and they come down slowly even when diesel does. If you

heat with oil, ask your supplier about locking in a price or a budget plan before the cold hits, because waiting for a miracle is a bad strategy. And watch what happens next week with that executive order. If it passes, great, take the savings. Just know what it is and what it isn't.

The G7 passed a hat around, and what came out was one day of oil. The strategic reserve is the lowest it's been since the eighties, diesel is more than two and a half dollars higher than last year, and the one thing that would fix it is a war the president says he'll win after the election. Europe made a gesture. Your truckers, your grocery store and your furnace are still waiting on the real thing.

We'll be right back.

09 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

10 — SEGMENT D: THE ARMY BUILDS A ROBOT COMMAND

The United States Army is getting a robot command. Not a pilot program tucked away at some test range. Not a study group. A command, with its own name, its own acronym, and its own boss in charge of buying the hardware.

Here is how it came out. Axios reporter Colin Demarest got hold of a memo this week. It was issued Thursday, which was yesterday, by Adam Telle, the acting Secretary of the Army. The title is "Army Autonomous Initiatives." It orders the creation of the Army Futures and Autonomous Systems Command. The Army is calling it FASCOM.

The timing matters. That memo went out one day after Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth revealed two projects, one called Meridian and one called Agincourt. Axios says both are focused on the robotized future of warfare. The details on what each one does were not spelled out in the reporting I have. But the name Agincourt tells you something. At the Battle of Agincourt

in fourteen fifteen, English archers with cheap longbows cut down heavily armored French knights who were supposed to win. A cheap weapon beating an expensive one. Whoever picked that name knows exactly what they are talking about.

So Hegseth set the direction on Wednesday, and Telle turned it into orders on Thursday. Let's go through what the memo says, because it is more specific than most Pentagon paperwork.

First, the command itself. FASCOM stands for Futures and Autonomous Systems Command. Futures and autonomy under one roof. The Army already has a Futures Command, so this is the Army saying that machines that think for themselves, or at least act without a soldier holding the stick, deserve their own lane. Somebody gets a desk, a staff and a budget line, and somebody gets blamed if it does not work. That alone is more than most big ideas ever get.

Second, the memo orders what it calls "autonomous force development to create force structure aligning autonomous capability" in at least six service formations. That is a mouthful, so here is what it means. The Army is not putting all the robots in one special unit in a corner. It wants autonomy built into the regular force. The memo names aviation, armor, sustainment and training. Helicopters and the crews around them. Tanks and the units that fight with them. The trucks and supply lines that keep everybody fed and fueled. And the schoolhouses where soldiers learn the job. And that is only four of the six, with the word "including" right there in the text, so there is more on the list than we have been told.

Third, the memo tells the Army to designate a, quote, "portfolio acquisition executive for autonomy." End quote. Now, that title sounds like something a consultant invented, but the idea is simple. One person in charge of buying this stuff, instead of fifteen offices each buying a piece and none of them talking to each other. And the memo tells this executive where to focus this fiscal year. Autonomous fires. Combat vehicles. Watercraft resupply. Breachers. Surveillance and targeting. And, quote, "more." End quote.

Look at that list. Autonomous fires means machines that help put rounds on a target. Combat vehicles means robots that roll into the fight. Watercraft resupply means unmanned boats hauling ammunition and supplies. Breachers means machines that blow open obstacles and minefields, which is the kind of job where a soldier used to walk up and hope. Surveillance and targeting means eyes in the sky and on the ground. Every one of those jobs is dangerous, and every one of them puts a young American in harm's way today.

Fourth, the memo expands two job codes. The Army calls its jobs military occupational specialties. The two in question are fifteen X and three hundred and ninety A. The memo orders those authorizations expanded, quote, "to all applicable Army units." End quote. And Axios notes that back in August, the Army described fifteen X, the tactical unmanned aircraft systems specialist, as its newest role. Newest role in August. By October the Army wants that specialty in every unit where it fits. That is how fast this is moving.

Now listen to how Telle explained it. He told Axios that Hegseth, quote, "made it clear: We are done with the bureaucratic inertia holding back modernization." End quote. And then the line that tells you how the Army wants this to sound. Telle said, quote, "The Army is rapidly advancing to maintain our lethal edge. This is about combat readiness to destroy the enemy and ensure our Army never enters a fair fight." End quote.

Never enters a fair fight. I like that. I really do. Nobody who has ever worn the uniform wants a fair fight. A fair fight means a coin flip with your friends' lives. You want to show up with every advantage, and you want the other side to wish they had stayed home.

So why now? Axios gives the answer in two lines. U.S. military leaders have pushed what they call manned-unmanned teaming for years. Soldiers and machines working together. But, quote, the incredible success of drones in Eastern Europe, whether on the ground, in the air or on the water, has, quote, "raised the stakes." End quote.

That is the real story. For years, the generals talked about the future in slide decks. Then Ukraine and Russia started fighting a war where the future

showed up with a battery and a camera. Drones that cost less than a used pickup truck have been hunting down vehicles worth millions. Drones in the air. Drones crawling on the ground. Drones skimming across the water. Everybody who watched that war learned the same lesson at the same time. The side that sees first and strikes first with the cheapest tool wins the day, and the old way of doing things gets chewed up.

The Army was watching. Every major army on earth was watching. And the ones who pretend they were not are the ones in trouble.

Here is what it means for the soldier on the ground. A private in an infantry company a few years ago carried a rifle, a radio and a pack. The private in the next few years might carry all of that plus a drone that rides in the pack and goes up before the squad moves. Squads will scout with machines before they scout with their own eyes. Supply convoys may roll with fewer people exposed in the lead truck. Breaching an obstacle may mean sending a machine first. If this works the way the memo hopes, a lot of soldiers go home who otherwise would not. That is the best case, and it is a good one.

Axios paired this story with a piece about the Eighty-Second Airborne's machine-fueled fight, and a photo from Fort Bragg in North Carolina of Perennial Autonomy drones stacked inside something called a Bee Hive. Stacked drones in a hive. That is not science fiction. That is a shelf at Fort Bragg.

You can see the same idea right here at home. On September twenty-sixth, a Coast Guard boat crew on the Rio Grande near Garceno, Texas, came under fire from the Mexican side of the river. The crew returned fire, and nobody on our side was hurt. Coast Guard spokesperson Lieutenant Commander Rachel Ault said so. Thank God for that. But think about that boat. Think about what it means to put people in a small boat on a river where gunfire from the far bank is not new. If a machine can run that patrol, a crew does not have to be in the line of fire. I am not saying the Army's plan is about the border. The memo does not say that. But watercraft and surveillance are both on the list, and the need is real.

Now for the hard question. Can cutting what Telle calls bureaucratic inertia actually put this hardware in soldiers' hands?

I want to believe it. The structure makes sense. One command. One executive in charge of buying. Clear priorities for this fiscal year. Job codes expanded so the people who fly and fix this stuff exist in every unit. That is the right skeleton.

But a memo is not a drone. Anybody who has watched the Pentagon buy anything knows the distance between an order signed on Thursday and a working machine in a soldier's hands is measured in years and billions. Programs get announced with a flourish and then die in testing, or in a budget fight, or in a contracting dispute where the loser files a protest and everything freezes. We have seen it over and over. A new command is also one more box on the organizational chart, and boxes have a way of growing staff, meetings and paperwork. The thing meant to cut red tape can wind up wrapped in its own.

There is also the question of who gets the money. When the Army says it wants autonomy, the big defense contractors smell a payday. The danger is that the Army buys a few exquisite, expensive, gold-plated machines when the lesson from Eastern Europe is the opposite. The lesson is cheap, plentiful and replaceable. Drones that get shot down by the hundreds and keep coming. If FASCOM ends up buying twelve robots that cost a fortune each, it will have learned nothing from the war it is studying. Agincourt was won with cheap longbows, not with the fanciest armor on the field.

And here is the part nobody in Washington wants to talk about. Autonomy raises real questions. When a machine helps pick a target, who is responsible if it picks wrong? The memo says autonomous fires, and it says targeting. A soldier can be held accountable. A commander can be held accountable. A line of code cannot stand in front of a family and explain itself. I am not against these tools. I am against pretending the questions do not exist. Congress and the public deserve straight answers on where the human stays in the loop, and they should get them before the machines are fielded, not after something goes wrong.

Then there is the soldier himself. The Army is creating new specialties and asking young men and women to master them fast. That means real training, real equipment, and real pay that reflects a skill the private sector will happily bid for. A drone operator who learns this trade in the Army is going to get job offers from civilian companies the day his enlistment ends. If the Army wants to keep these people, it has to treat them like the scarce talent they are.

So where does that leave us? The direction is right. The Army saw what drones did in Eastern Europe and decided not to be the last one to learn the lesson. Putting autonomy into aviation, armor, sustainment and training, naming one person to buy it, and spreading the drone specialties across the force is a serious plan on paper.

But paper is cheap. The test comes in the next twelve months, when we find out whether FASCOM delivers machines to the soldiers who need them, at prices that make sense, with rules that keep humans in charge. If it does, the Army will have found a way to protect its people and win. If it does not, we will have a fancy new command, a new acronym, and the same old Pentagon.

Taxpayers are paying for this. The soldiers are betting their lives on it. Both of them deserve results, not a memo.

We'll be right back.

11 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

12 — CLOSING / SIGN-OFF

That's the show tonight, and I want to say thank you for spending your evening with me.

We covered a lot of ground. A river border. A paycheck. A fuel pump. A battlefield. Four different stories, and they all come down to the same question. Did what Washington promised actually show up for ordinary Americans?

Out on that border, we were promised control. Ask the people who live along the water whether they feel it. At the paycheck, we were promised relief. Ask the family sitting at the kitchen table with the bills spread out. At the fuel pump, we were promised lower prices. Ask the driver watching the numbers climb while he fills up for work. And on the battlefield, we were promised a plan and an end in sight. Ask the families who have a chair sitting empty at dinner.

Speeches are cheap. Press conferences are cheap. Anybody in a good suit can stand behind a podium and say the right words. What counts is what lands in your life. Is your street safer? Is your paycheck stretching further? Is your tank costing you less? Are our people being asked to sacrifice for something that makes sense?

I'm not going to hand you the answer. You don't need me for that. You've got your own eyes, your own wallet, and your own front door. Look at what's landed in your life since the promises were made, and judge by that. That's the only scorecard that matters.

To everyone who called in, wrote in, and stuck around tonight, thank you. This show exists because you keep showing up, and I never take that for granted.

Get some rest, hug your family, and keep asking hard questions. The people in charge ought to be nervous about the folks who are paying attention, and that's you.

I'll be back Monday at seven, and I hope you'll be here with me.

I'm Mark Ford. God bless, kiss the kids, be safe and good night.