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# The Columbus Dispatch

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## 'Today marks an historic milestone'



Visitors gather Wednesday for the startup of operations at the American Centrifuge Plant in Piketon. It is the first new U.S. technology uranium enrichment plant to begin production in this country since 1954. BROOKE LAVALLEY/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

### Uranium enrichment resumes in the state for the first time in a generation

**Mark Williams**  
Columbus Dispatch  
USA TODAY NETWORK

PIKETON - Uranium is being enriched in Ohio for the first time in a generation, and it's being done using new technology that supporters say offers the potential of creating thousands of

jobs across the country to power a new generation of nuclear reactors.

On Wednesday, Centrus Energy Corp. and U.S. Department of Energy officials flipped the switches to start the enrichment process at the American Centrifuge Plant near this village in Pike County in southern Ohio.

"Today marks an historic milestone,"

Centrus CEO and President Daniel Poneman told a gathering of government, industry, labor and nuclear industry leaders at the plant. "A few minutes ago, we witnessed the first launch of a new U.S. technology uranium enrichment plant to begin production in this

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A "sold" sign is seen in front of a home in Bexley. BARBARA J. PERENIC/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

## Bill aims to combat rising property values

Ohio House legislation OK'd, heads to Senate

**Haley BeMiller**  
State Bureau  
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Ohio House passed legislation Wednesday to change how home values are calculated in an effort to blunt the impact of property tax increases.

But the state's tax woes are still far from resolved.

House Bill 187 would require the tax commissioner to use three years' worth of home sale data to determine home values in 2023, 2024 and 2025, instead of only the most recent year. That change would lower the value increases for some owners significantly. Butler County, for example, would

See PROPERTY VALUES, Page 8A

## Hamas calls for global protests Friday

### Blinken, Netanyahu meet as Israel death tolls rise

**John Bacon and David Jackson**  
USA TODAY

The American death toll from Hamas' attack on Israel has risen to 25, as a former leader of the militant group calls for protests around the world, causing some Americans with immediate travel plans to weigh agonizing choices.

Khaled Meshaal's recordings, re-

viewed by Reuters, have reverberated on social media and stoked rumors that a "jihad" in the "squares and streets of the Arab and Islamic world" could lead to violence on Friday. Natalie Sanandaji, 28, from Long Island, New York, was in Athens on Thursday deciding on flight options home.

"I'm hoping to get home as soon as possible, but there's this fear of traveling on the 13th, tomorrow," Sanandaji told USA TODAY. "People are telling us to avoid crowded places and I'm looking at these layovers in Egypt or London or

Paris and those are high-risk places."

In the U.S., National Security Council spokesman John Kirby addressed the rumors at the White House this week. Kirby said federal, state and local authorities were working to identify and disrupt any threats toward the Jewish community.

Sanandaji, a first generation American born to Israeli and Iranian parents, escaped the music festival near Kibbutz Re'im where more than 200 revelers

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, right, and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken make statements to the media Thursday inside The Kirya, which houses the Israeli Ministry of Defense, after their meeting in Tel Aviv. JACQUELYN MARTIN/POOL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

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# Uranium

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country since 1954.”

“We were happy to help shoulder what was happening in the Gaseous Diffusion facility for so many years,” Pike County Commissioner Tony Montgomery said. “We were honored to help carry that load to help defend our nation and make it what it is, to make it the super power that it is. To continue that with Centrus and these things is just what we do.”

Centrus’ plant is on the site of the Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant where uranium was enriched initially to fuel nuclear weapons during the Cold War, then used to fuel nuclear power utilities.

Enrichment activities ended in 2001 at the Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant, and then at a sister plant near Paducah, Kentucky, in 2013.

The end of uranium enrichment by an American company has left the U.S. dependent on other countries, including Russia, said Centrus, based in Bethesda, Maryland.

“Today 100% of the world’s uranium enrichment capacity belongs to foreign, state-owned enterprises,” Poneman said.

The U.S. once dominated the global nuclear fuel market, and now is the biggest importer of enriched uranium, he said.

“We’ve been working ever since to get back, and today we’re back,” Poneman later told reporters.

## What’s different this time?

The new plant is betting on technology called High-Assay Low-Enriched Uranium, or HALEU.

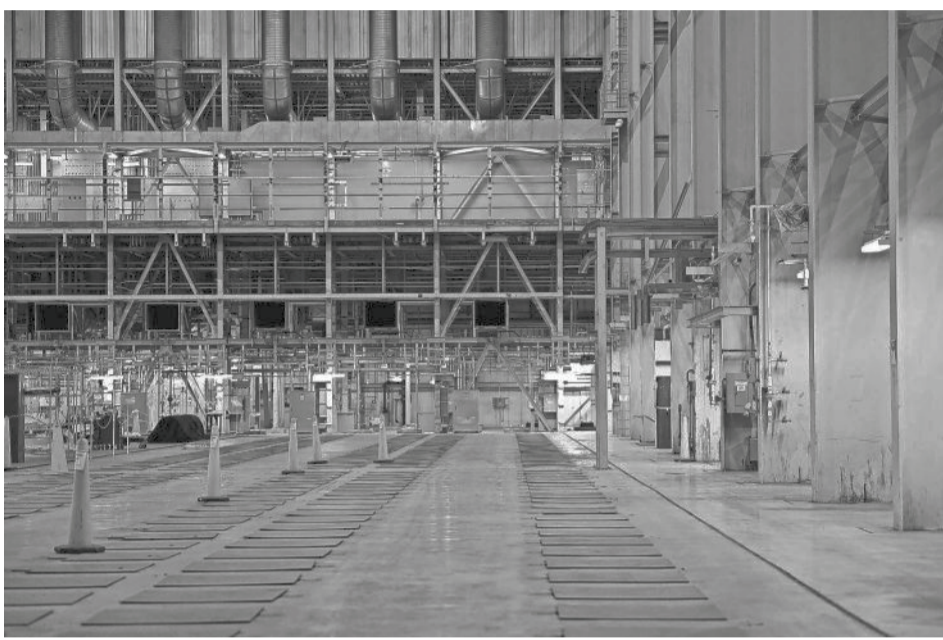
The plant at Piketon is the nation’s only HALEU facility licensed by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and the first new U.S.-owned, U.S.-technology uranium enrichment plant to begin production since 1954.

“HALEU is the next chapter in this incredible story,” said David Turk, Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Energy Department. “For the first time ever, an American company is producing HALEU on American soil, providing critical fuel for advanced nuclear reactors. That is a big, big deal.”

The technology is meant to serve the next generation of advanced reactors that are smaller, more efficient and have



**Daniel Poneman, CEO of Centrus Energy Corp., speaks to the crowd during an announcement Wednesday about the startup of uranium enrichment at the American Centrifuge plant in Piketon.** BROOKE LAVALLEY/COLUMBUS DISPATCH



**A look inside the American Centrifuge uranium enrichment plant in Piketon, Pike County, on Wednesday.** PHOTO PROVIDED BY CENTRUS

longer operating cycles. It can serve the existing fleet of reactors, continue to provide the enriched uranium for the country’s nuclear weapons and help with the nation’s push to eliminate emissions of carbon dioxide, Poneman said.

The technology is so efficient that just 750 grams, about three tablespoons, of the enriched uranium is enough to generate a lifetime of electricity for a single American consumer, he said.

“Here, the United States can recover its lost nuclear independence,” Poneman said.

Centrus on Wednesday began enrichment in a tiny part of the plant with 16 centrifuges capable of producing about a ton of HALEU per year.

The plant has the capacity of 5,760 centrifuges, and the company has the potential of building another plant on the site.

Centrus currently has 125 workers on

the site with the potential to go up to as many as 500, and that could lead to thousands more across the country to build out a supply chain, the company said.

All of the work is taking place on the 3,777-acre site that Centrus shares with the Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant, where cleanup and decontamination activities are continuing.

Many workers became sick from exposure to toxic and radioactive materials at the site and the nearby Piketon community has experienced high cancer rates.

## Centrus says government partnership critical to plant’s success

Development of the plant in Piketon is part of a partnership between the Department of Energy (DOE) and Centrus.

“In a global marketplace controlled by state-owned enterprises, America can only regain its place by a robust public-private partnership,” Poneman said.

The project has had its ups and downs over the years between pressure on the nuclear industry and inconsistent federal support that led the project being shut down in 2016.

The Trump administration committed \$115 million toward the project in 2019.

Last year, the DOE under the Biden administration announced a \$150-million, shared-cost program with the company for the Piketon project that included a \$30-million cost share during the first year to startup and operate 16 centrifuges.

Also, the Inflation Reduction Act passed by Congress in 2022 includes \$700 million to support the development of a domestic supply chain for HALEU, and Congress is weighing more support of as much as \$2.4 billion.

## What is HALEU?

When uranium ore is extracted from the Earth, the concentration of the fissile isotope uranium-235 is less than 1%, the company said. Most existing reactors in the United States and worldwide operate on low-enriched uranium fuel that has been enriched to a concentration of the U-235 isotope of slightly less than 5%.

HALEU uranium is further enriched so that the U-235 concentration is between 5% and 20%.

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# Israel

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were killed by Hamas militants during Saturday’s attack. She said she felt sad and relieved – and anxious for loved ones she left behind in Israel.

“One of the scariest things was running in one direction, then seeing dozens of other kids running in our direction, and then realizing they were being chased by gunmen and we had to turn back,” Sanandaji said. “We had split second decisions. It was saving us or killing us.”

The U.S. State Department raised its alert level Wednesday for American travelers to Israel and the West Bank, urging them to reconsider their plans. Travel advisories already are in place urging increased caution for U.S. citizens traveling to Jordan and Turkey, advising them to reconsider travel to Egypt and Lebanon because of terrorism. “Terrorists may attack with little or no warning,” the agency said.

## Blinken meets with Netanyahu in Israel

Hamas’ call for global protests comes one day after U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Tel Aviv in a show of support for Israel, its military operations in Gaza and its goal of destroying Hamas.

“Hamas has only one agenda, to destroy Israel and to murder Jews,” Blinken said. “No country can or would tolerate the slaughter of its citizens or return to the conditions that allowed it to take place.”

The war has already claimed over 2,500 lives on both sides, including citi-

zens from 36 nations. International aid groups warn that the death toll may rise as Israel stopped all deliveries of food, water, fuel and electricity to Gaza.

Blinken said Hamas, instead of promoting the well-being of Gazans, rules repressively and funnels resources to “terror tunnels and rockets.”

“I’m in Israel today to make one thing clear,” Blinken said. “The United States stands with Israel and its people, and we will always stand resolutely against terrorism.”

Netanyahu thanked Blinken and the U.S. for “standing with Israel today, tomorrow, and always.”

Israel’s military said Thursday that 247 soldiers have been killed since the start of the war – an increase from 222 earlier in the day. The military previously confirmed to The Associated Press that the 222 soldiers had all been identified and their families notified.

## Trump criticizes Netanyahu, calls Hezbollah ‘very smart’

Donald Trump lashed out at Netanyahu during a Wednesday campaign stop in Florida, saying Israel’s intelligence failed, and its enemies were “very smart.”

“I’ll never forget that Bibi Netanyahu let us down,” Trump told supporters in West Palm Beach. “That was a very terrible thing.”

Trump discussed the operation that killed Iranian military leader Qasem Soleimani in early 2020. The former president said Israel now has to strengthen itself as it fights Hamas and other militant groups, including perhaps Iran.

Supporters of Israel said on social media said that the Soleimani operation was aided by Israeli intelligence, while others disapproved of Trump



**Smoke billows during an Israeli airstrike in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Thursday. Egypt has been trying to persuade Israel and the United States to allow the delivery of aid and fuel through Rafah.** SAID KHATIB/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

criticizing Israel’s government in the midst of a crisis.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is running against Trump for the Republican nomination, zeroed in on Trump’s description of Hezbollah leaders as “very smart.”

Noting that at least 1,200 Israelis and 22 Americans have been killed in recent days, DeSantis said on social media site X that “it is absurd that anyone, much less someone running for President, would choose now to attack our friend and ally, Israel, much less praise Hezbollah terrorists as ‘very smart.’ As President, I will stand with Israel and treat terrorists like the scum that they are.”

During what was otherwise a campaign speech, Trump claimed that an unnamed U.S. official described Israel as being vulnerable from the north, and that kind of information would be helpful to adversaries.

“You know, Hezbollah is very smart – they’re all very smart,” Trump said at one point.

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The Columbus Dispatch, USPS# 1074-097X, is published 6 days per week excluding Saturday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving (observed), Christmas Day (observed) and New Year’s Day (observed) by Gannett Media Corp, 62 E. Broad St., Columbus, Ohio, 43216. Periodicals postage paid at Columbus, Ohio and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Please send address changes to The Columbus Dispatch, 62 E. Broad St., P.O. Box 1289, Columbus, Ohio, 43216.

*Contributing: The Associated Press*