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## SPOTLIGHT

### Wisconsin's Trickle-Down Ballot Effect

#### Gov. Tony Evers' decision against reelection could hand Republicans more control

By Amelia Monroe

As Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers (D) forgoes a reelection bid, the seat that Democrats speculated would be a slam-dunk in 2026 could now hand Republicans an avenue to advance their hold in the Badger State.

“It would be hard for [Democrats] to take credit or piggyback off the governor’s eight years,” Brandon Scholz, a Wisconsin political lobbyist at The Capitol Group, told *Hotline*. “Republicans will be ready to pounce on those that try to take credit on things, like on property taxes or income tax cuts, the governor signed but he vetoed the first time through.”

Evers has a track record of pushing progressive policy points like securing more than \$4 billion in tax relief while also vetoing hundreds of bills passed by the Republican-controlled Legislature.

The open seat race is pulling in high-profile Democratic and Republican candidates that think they have a shot at the top position now that Evers, with an almost 50-50 approval rating, is out of the race.

On the Democratic side, notable names like Lt. Gov. Sara Rodriguez and state Attorney General Josh Kaul have already launched campaigns. But, their runs for governor could put their current positions on Republicans’ radar of seats up for grabs—especially as Democrats battle for control of the state Senate, trying to narrow the 18-15 Republican majority.

Gubernatorial races tend to have an overwhelming downballot effect, which could put key congressional seats out of reach for Democrats if their pick for governor lacks a “wow factor.”

“Whoever has the better organization, the better statewide campaign, the better coordinated campaign downballot, whether it be congressional or legislative, will benefit from it,” Scholz said. “If you’re downballot and the top of the ticket isn’t worth a crap that doesn’t help you at all.”

– *Amelia Monroe*

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## Quote of the Day

" I have the dubious distinction of being elected the youngest senator in American history and the oldest president in American history. It's hell turning 40 twice. " — Former President Biden joking about his age at the National Bar Association's annual gala, CNN, 7/31

## HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

### MAGA Inc. raises \$176M in first half of the year

By Erika Filter and Amelia Monroe

### DEMOCRATS: Harris Calls System 'Broken,' Defends Biden in First Post-Election Interview

Former Vice President Kamala Harris said in her first interview since the election she is not running for governor because she does not want to "go back in the system," calling it "broken."

- **HARRIS SAYS:** "I always believed that as fragile as our democracy is, our systems would be strong enough to defend our most fundamental principles. And I think right now that they're not as strong as they need to be."
- **WORLD TOUR.** She said she instead plans to travel the country talking to voters.
- **STILL RIDIN'.** Harris said she has "an incredible amount of respect for" former President Biden and recalled him as a president who believed in the rule of law and integrity, declining to comment on his performance in the debate or his age.
- **HARRIS SAYS:** "It was Joe's decision, and he made that decision."
- **BE REAL.** Harris said the idea of riding out President Trump's administration "is completely naive." (*Late Show with Stephen Colbert*)
- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** Harris' attitude toward Biden is a stark contrast from that of others in the party, who have expressed regret that Biden did not drop out sooner and said in retrospect that his cognitive decline was clear. For Harris, who may be mulling a 2028 run, it might be difficult to get back in sync with the rest of the party if she maintains close ties to Biden.
- **TOP OF THE TICKET.** Though he never mentioned Trump by name in his speech at the National Bar Association's annual gala, Biden warned "the country is facing 'dark days' under" Trump's "watch, saying the executive branch 'seems to be doing its best to dismantle the Constitution.'"
- **UNDOING MY WORK.** He said the Trump administration is working to "ease all the gains we've made in my administration, to erase history, rather than make it, to erase fairness, equality, to erase justice itself." (CNN)

### FUNDRAISING ROUNDUP: Trump Super PAC Raises \$176M

Groups associated with President Trump amassed millions in the first six months of his presidency.

- **MAGA INC.** MAGA Inc., the pro-Trump super PAC, received about \$176.9 million from donors in the first half of the year, spending \$4.6 million and closing out June with \$196.1 million in the bank. (FEC)
- **NEVER SURRENDER.** Trump's leadership PAC, Never Surrender, raised \$28.1 million in the first half of the year, spent \$16.9 million, and ended the first half of the year with \$38.5 million. (FEC)

### **GENERAL ELECTION: New Report on Black Women's Representation in Congress**

A new report from Higher Heights Leadership Fund and the Center for American Women and Politics shows the number of Black women in state legislator positions hit a record high in 2025, holding 5.4% of seats.

- **BY THE NUMBERS.** Twenty-nine Black women currently hold national congressional seats, including two in the Senate. No Black woman has been elected governor and eight are currently presiding as a mayor.
- **WIN RATE.** In 2024, 63% of Black women who were congressional nominees won their races, compared to 48.9% of women candidates across race and ethnicity and 53.3% of men candidates across race and ethnicity.
- **IN THE STATES.** Since 2014, "the number of Black women state legislators has risen from 240 to 401, a 67.1% increase in just over a decade."
- **PARTISAN TIES.** Most of the growth in Black women's representation in elected office has happened on the Democratic side. (release)

### **WHITE HOUSE: Laura Loomer Helps Trump Enforce Staff Loyalty**

While there has been less turnover in President Trump's second administration than his first, "nearly all of the ousters have come after individuals were targeted by outside allies who convinced the president that they weren't sufficiently loyal."

- **OUTSIDER EFFECT.** 2020 FL-21 nominee Laura Loomer (R) "said she is now fielding tips from administration officials about colleagues they want exiled amid what she called 'a serious vetting crisis,' predicting there are 'hundreds' more she expects to purge." (*Politico*)

### **2028 WATCH: Pete Buttigieg Sparks 2028 Rumors**

Former Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg will speak at the Michigan Democratic Party's "Best of the West" event in October.

- **ONE PROBLEM.** Democratic strategists say Buttigieg struggles to gain support from Black voters, which has been mirrored in polling. (*The Hill*)

### **HOTLINE LATEST EDITION**

## **SLF outraised SMP during first half of year**

By Nicholas Anastácio

### **BATTLE FOR THE SENATE: John Thune Works to Defend His Majority**

Majority Leader John Thune inherited the reins of Sen. Mitch McConnell's (R-KY) political machine, remarking he has "big shoes to fill." While Thune compares asking for money to "chewing on tinfoil," he is proving to his GOP colleagues that he can lead them through the 2026 midterms.

- **WINNER WINNER.** Thune led SLF to "to record sums in an off year, is doing joint statements with the" NRSC "to back incumbents and clear primary fields, and is putting his name on digital advertising at a far higher rate than McConnell did."
- **CHICKEN DINNER.** Thune also isn't an ad-attack magnet like McConnell or Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, benefitting from his relative anonymity at the national level. (*Semafor*)

### **POLLING ROUNDUP: Roy Cooper Ahead of Michael Whatley in General Election Matchup**

An Emerson College poll in North Carolina (July 28-30; 1,000 RVs; +/-3%) found former Gov. Roy Cooper (D) ahead of RNC Chairman Michael Whatley (R), 47%-41%, with 12% undecided in a head-to-head general election matchup. (*Politico*)

- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** Cooper's high name recognition from decades in statewide office benefits him early in the race. Whatley, a generic Republican, has room to increase his name ID, but will need to target the former governor's favorability among swing voters.
- **ANOTHER ONE.** A Victory Insights poll in North Carolina (July 28-30; 600 LVs) found Cooper at 43% and Whatley at 40% with 16% undecided. When undecided voters were asked who they're leaning towards, Cooper and Whatley got 44% each. No margin of error was provided for the poll. (release)
- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** Cooper isn't guaranteed to win the race on name ID alone, especially when running up against a Democratic drought of federal statewide wins. Democrats haven't won a Senate race in the state since 2008, giving their best recruit a tall task next year.
- **IDAHO.** A Change Research poll in Idaho (July 15-17; 1,027 RVs; +/-3.2%) conducted for the left-of-center Conservation Voters for Idaho found Sen. Jim Risch (R) ahead in a general election matchup. The poll, shared exclusively with *Hotline*, found Risch at 41%, 2024 ID-02 nominee David Roth (D) at 16%, former state Rep. Todd Achilles (I) at 5%, and 2022 candidate Natalie Fleming (I) at 5%. 31% were undecided. (*Hotline* reporting)
- **PUBLIC LANDS.** On the failed OBBB amendment sponsored by Sen. Mike Lee (R-UT) to sell hundreds of thousands of acres of public lands across 11 Western states—including Idaho, 91% of voters approved of Risch's opposition to the amendment. (*Hotline* reporting)
- **IN THE PAST.** Conservation Voters for Idaho endorsed Achilles for reelection to the state House in 2024 while he identified as a Democrat. Achilles served as a partner of the organization for more than a decade according to the group's website.
- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** Risch remains in a strong position to win a fourth term. Achilles' attempt to ride the independent wave faces a difficult start as he holds low statewide name recognition.

### **FUNDRAISING ROUNDUP: SLF Outpaces SMP During First Half of 2025**

Senate Republicans' top super PAC outperformed Senate Democrats' super PAC in fundraising during the first half of the year.

- **SLF.** The GOP-aligned SLF raised \$26.5 million, spent \$2.8 million, and had \$29.8 million on hand. (FEC)
- **SMP.** The Democratic-aligned Senate Majority PAC raised \$17.4 million, spent \$12.9 million, and entered July with \$13.6 million on hand and \$20.8 million in debt. (FEC)

### **AD ROUNDUP: Social Welfare Group Boosts Susan Collins on Social Security**

Stronger America, a 501(c)(4), is launching a \$2 million ad buy in support of Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) in her home state. The 30-second ad, which will air in Bangor, Portland, and Presque Isle on broadcast, cable, and digital, touts the senator's work on Social Security. Stronger America "is blessed by Collins political world."

- **HANDS OFF.** Senate Opportunity Fund, a group affiliated with Majority Whip John Barrasso, is launching a \$250,000 ad buy on streaming services against Sen. Jon Ossoff (D-GA) in Georgia. The 30-second ad criticizes Ossoff for his vote against the OBBB, arguing he "voted to raise taxes."
- **THANK YOU FRIEND.** Senate Opportunity Fund is also airing an ad in support of Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-AK) in Alaska. The spot highlights the senator's record on border security and Medicaid. (*Punchbowl News*)
- **NOT A BOY'S BOY.** Waste removal entrepreneur Nate Morris (R), who's running to replace retiring Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY), is launching a seven-figure statewide ad buy in Kentucky in support of President Trump's tariff policy. The spot pushes back against Morris' competitors—Rep. Andy Barr (R-O6) and 2023 GOV nominee Daniel Cameron (R)—while touting his blue-collar roots. (*Politico*)

### FLORIDA: Josh Weil Exits Race Over Health Concerns

2025 FL-06 nominee Josh Weil (D) said he's dropping out of the race against Sen. Ashley Moody (R) due to health concerns. Weil has Rhabdomyolysis, a rare, life-threatening condition "in which the muscles break down following an injury or excessive exercise without rest."

- **WHO COULD JUMP IN?** State Rep. Angie Nixon (D), former Brevard County School Board member Jennifer Jenkins (D), and retired Army Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Vindman (D) are considering Senate bids. (*Florida Phoenix*)

### NORTH CAROLINA: GOP Lines Up Behind Michael Whatley

Republican officials are lining up behind RNC Chairman Michael Whatley's bid to replace retiring Sen. Thom Tillis (R) following his official announcement on Thursday. Running with President Trump's blessing, Whatley has secured endorsements from NRSC Chairman Tim Scott and Majority Leader John Thune.

- **CHECKBOOKS OUT!** Scott is working to ensure the entire Senate GOP conference gets behind Whatley. He asked GOP senators on Tuesday "to make a maximum contribution to Whatley's campaign directly and to join the host committee for an NRSC-hosted fundraiser for Whatley set to happen in September."
- **IT'S OURS.** According to a NRSC memo, the GOP campaign arm believes Trump's three wins in the state, his "improved vote share in 83 out of 100 counties," and voter registration trends point towards a Whatley victory.
- **BLUNT.** Lauren French, spokesperson for the Democratic-aligned Senate Majority PAC, said in a statement after Whatley's announcement: "Welcome to the race. You're going to lose." (*NOTUS*)

### NEBRASKA: State Democratic Party Chair Supports Dan Osborn

Nebraska Democratic Party Chair Jane Kleeb threw her support behind 2024 candidate Dan Osborn (I) in the race against Sen. Pete Ricketts (R), saying on social media: "We are supporting Osborn."

- **KLEEB SAYS:** “We believe a coalition of Dems, Indys, and Republicans can beat Ricketts and break up the one-party rule. We like the odds of a mechanic vs a billionaire.”
- **NOT OURS.** State Democratic spokesperson José Flores Jr. said the party doesn’t endorse candidates, but isn’t actively looking for a candidate. A Democrat could still enter the race.
- **HERE’S YOUR BLUE.** The Ricketts campaign and Nebraska Republicans jumped on Kleeb’s post, calling Osborn a “Democrat” and pointing to his support from Democratic leaders. (*Nebraska Examiner*)

## HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

### Jeffries meets with Texas Democrats in Austin

By James A. Downs and Amelia Monroe

### FUNDRAISING ROUNDUP: Super PACs File Mid-Year Reports

The major PACs released their mid-year fundraising reports, with Republicans outpacing Democrats. The GOP-aligned Congressional Leadership Fund raised \$32.7 million, spent \$1.6 million, and had \$32.7 million on hand.

- **FAMILIAR FACES.** Former Trump adviser Elon Musk gave \$5 million to CLF, and GOP megadonor Peter Thiel gave \$10,000 through a joint fundraising committee. (FEC)
- **DEMS.** The Democratic-aligned House Majority PAC raised \$21.2 million, spent \$4.2 million, and had \$22.1 million on hand. (FEC)
- **OF NOTE.** MAGA KY, the pro-Trump super PAC trying to oust Rep. Thomas Massie (R-KY 04), raised \$2 million, spent \$490,000, and had a little more than \$1.5 million on hand. GOP megadonor Paul Singer gave \$1 million to the effort. (FEC)

### CALIFORNIA 45: Michelle Steel Turns Down Another Run

Former Rep. Michelle Steel (R) will not seek a rematch with Rep. Derek Tran (D). The two-term representative lost by just over 600 votes to Tran last year and said she has “other goals” she would like to accomplish other than elected office. (Fox News)

- **LAY OF THE LAND.** No Republican has joined the field to take on Tran yet. Orange County Supervisor Janet Nguyen (R) is a potential candidate.

### FLORIDA 06: City Councilor is Likely to Enter Race

Palm Coast City Councilor Charles Gambaro Jr. (R) could enter the race to unseat Rep. Randy Fine (R), who won his seat in a special election last April. Gambaro has held his current position for less than a year, after being appointed to the seat in 2024. (*Daytona Beach News-Journal*)

- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** Fine ran an underwhelming campaign to replace former Rep. Mike Waltz (R), who resigned to join the administration, winning significantly underrunning President Trump in the deeply Republican district. He has drawn some unflattering press since joining Congress, so there’s a chance his support could waver, especially given he’s a freshman.

## NEW JERSEY 07: Another Biden Official Mulls a Bid

Former Biden administration official Megan O'Rourke (D) is floating a congressional bid to take on Rep. Tom Kean Jr. (R) in the midterms. O'Rourke has a rich history in battling climate change, serving as an environment adviser for USAID before moving to USDA as an agricultural climate change adviser.

- **THE FIELD.** O'Rourke would join a crowded primary, where she would take on two other former Biden administration officials in the upcoming primaries, Michael Roth (D) and Tina Shah (D), former Navy helicopter pilot Rebecca Bennett (D), businessman Brian Varela (D), and 2022 candidate Greg Vartan (D).
- **FUNDING BATTLE.** Bennett leads in terms of fundraising, raising just over \$913,000 for her campaign so far. Varela is in second with over \$693,000, \$400,000 of which is self-funded, followed by Roth with \$302,880, Shah with more than \$260,000 in her first day as a candidate, and Vartan with \$55,751. (*New Jersey Globe*)

## TEXAS REDISTRICTING: Jeffries Meets the Texans

Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries “declined Thursday to divulge behind-the-scenes strategy” for resisting Texas Republicans’ potential new congressional map. He met with Texas Democrats in Austin. Jeffries said all options are on the table but that Texas Democrats “are going to be the ones to decide that.” (*Austin American-Statesman*)

- **DOG GAMMIT.** Rep. Lloyd Doggett (D-37) said he has already filed for reelection and intends to run. Doggett said California and Maryland are two states Democrats might look to respond with redistricting of their own. The new map could potentially put Doggett in a member-on-member primary with Rep. Greg Casar (D-35). Doggett said he and Casar are more focused trying to stop the map from taking effect rather than the potential matchup. Two-thirds of Doggett’s current district would make up the new Austin-based seat. (CNN)

## SOUTH CAROLINA 05: State Senator Seeks Norman’s Seat

State Sen. Wes Climer (R) announced his bid to replace Rep. Ralph Norman (R), who is planning to run for governor instead of seeking reelection. During his campaign announcement, Climer touted his tenure in the state Legislature and friendship with Norman. Climer asserted he “looks forward to following in his footsteps in Congress.”

- **RED WAVE.** Climer first entered the political scene in 2016 with a “narrow three-point defeat of 25-year incumbent Wes Hayes in that year’s Republican primary.” His political ideology was rooted in ethics reform, which has since shifted “into one of the most reliably conservative votes” in the state Senate.
- **HURDLES.** Climer could face some hurdles during his campaign. He notably endorsed former Gov. Nikki Haley (R), who endorsed him in the 2016 primary, over President Trump in 2024. (*Palmetto Politics*)

## HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

# Kamala Harris forgoing run paves way for Katie Porter

By Abby Turner

## CALIFORNIA: Katie Porter Stands to Benefit from Kamala Harris Declining a Run

“No one is poised to benefit more than” former Rep. Katie Porter (D) from former Vice President Kamala Harris forgoing a gubernatorial run. Porter “shares an overlapping base of national benefactors and has performed better than all Democrats but Harris in public polling of the race.”

- **ALSO ELENİ.** But Lt. Gov. Eleni Kounalakis (D) “had an especially good day.” She received an endorsement from Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-11) and “she received a call from Harris before the former vice president made her announcement.” (*Politico*)
- **CASH COMES IN.** “Porter received a \$250,000 donation windfall in the 36 hours since Harris announced she wasn’t running.” Between March and June, she raised \$3 million “even as many donors stayed on the sidelines waiting to see if Harris would enter the race.” (*Politico*)

## OHIO: Vivek Ramaswamy Laps Amy Acton in Fundraising

2024 presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy (R) “is raising money on a scale and breadth that resembles a presidential campaign more than a run for Ohio statewide office.”

- **DIFFERENT HAULS.** “A new campaign-finance report showed \$9.7 million in donations coming from as far away as Guam between January and June,” while former state Department of Health Director Amy Acton (D) “raised about \$1.3 million during that same period.”
- **GET ON TV.** “In a state that has become reliably Republican over the past decade,” a large war chest “allows Ramaswamy and his allies to launch a tsunami of TV ads to turn voters against Acton, a first-time political candidate who rose to prominence as state health director during the 2020 coronavirus crisis.” (*Cleveland.com*)

## SOUTH CAROLINA: Nancy Mace Accidentally Reveals Gubernatorial Bid

Rep. Nancy Mace (R-01) “appears to have prematurely revealed the launch of her gubernatorial campaign next week while promoting her series of town halls in the Palmetto State. In a blast advertising the first stop of the ‘Mother of ALL Town Halls Tour’ in Myrtle Beach, the congresswoman’s team tagged the event as being hosted by ‘Nancy Mace for Governor.’” (*New York Post*)

## VIRGINIA: Youngkin Confident in Winsome Earle-Sears

Gov. Glenn Youngkin (R) said “he’s not worried” as Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears (R) “still trails behind” former Rep. Abigail Spanberger (D). (WSET)

- **DOING ENOUGH.** “Youngkin allies maintain he is fully engaged in the campaign, frequently on fundraising calls and serving as one of her biggest cheerleaders,” while others say he’s not involved enough. (CNN)



**OVERLOOKED****Freedom of Expression With a Few Exceptions**

By Amelia Monroe

The freedom of speech is a cornerstone of American democracy, but can come with a lot of asterisks that leave artists, books, and other media in the cross-fire between politics and expression. Since the adoption of the First Amendment, the foundational freedoms of expression have been the primary target during censorship attempts. One of the earliest cases of book censorship was in the late 1800s, which dealt with an individual that allegedly utilized the Postal Service to ship “lewd” and “obscene” material. Between 1889 and 1917 libraries across the country were on the frontlines of censorship adopted during an influx of immigration into the country—hundreds of libraries were specifically constructed to meet certain class and racial “standards.” One of the more famous cases was in the 1960s and dealt with three students—John Tinker, Mary Beth Tinker and their friend—who were expelled from school for wearing black armbands in protest of the Vietnam War. The case eventually made its way to the Supreme Court where they ruled that students do not lose the constitutional protection of peaceful protest at school.