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SPOTLIGHT

State Spotlight: Coke and Cane in Louisiana

Coca-Cola's move toward cane sugar is another win for President Trump and the Pelican State's sugar industry.

By Hannah Thacker

President Trump might be America's most powerful Coca-Cola aficionado. With one Truth Social post and a lot of enthusiasm, he might bring millions of dollars worth of business to the U.S. sugarcane industry: At Trump's urging, Coca-Cola announced that a new Coke product made with cane sugar will hit shelves in the fall.

Louisiana, one of three states that produces the majority of the sugarcane in the U.S., is poised to benefit from the president's sweet tooth.

"Sugar has a multi-billion dollar impact for the state, and anything that could potentially increase the value of the sugar would be great for the state and great for the farms. But again, it's still very early on in this whole process," Patrick Frischertz, a farmer at St. Louis Planting, told WAFB.

The hesitation comes from the complicated logistics that would need to be sorted out before Louisiana farmers see any change.

It's unclear how much sugar Coca-Cola will need for its new product, how U.S. farmers will meet the demand, and how the country's current quota system would need to be changed. Concerns have also been raised by U.S. corn producers about how the move might impact the state's corn industry, which contributes to the creation of high fructose corn syrup.

More importantly for Trump and his allies in the state, this is another campaign promise that has now been kept.

In a speech at the 2019 American Farm Bureau Federation's 100th Annual Convention in New Orleans that dove into how his immigration policies, tax cuts, and trade deals would help the everyday farmer, Trump repeated a version of a promise he first made in the 2016 election.

"We're turning all of that around with fair trade deals that put American farmers, ranchers, and, in fact, put America first. That's what I'm interested in: America first," Trump said.

Trump won the state with around 60% of the vote all three times he's been on the ballot. Despite no clear details on the situation and Trump's approval rating sitting around 44%, the switch to sugar for America's best selling soda seems small, but could be counted as a win for both the president and Louisiana.

— *Hannah Thacker*

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Quote of the Day

"I'm a football player. I play football. When you tell me you're going to run over me, then I become a little more physical. I'm not going to just lay down." — Rep. Emanuel Cleaver (D-MO 05) on the White House's possible redistricting plans for his district, Punchbowl News, 7/24.

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

Andy Beshear to continue interstate crossing in Nebraska

By Erika Filter

REPUBLICANS: House Republicans Subpoena DOJ Over Epstein Files

"In a surprise move, a House Oversight subcommittee voted Wednesday to subpoena the Department of Justice for files related to late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, a highly contentious issue that has exposed major divisions within the Republican party."

- **WHO'S WHO.** GOP Reps. Brian Jack (GA-03), Nancy Mace (SC-01), and Scott Perry (PA-10) joined four Democrats in voting to approve the subpoena.
- **WHAT'S WHAT.** "The subpoena calls for the Epstein files in the Justice Department's possession to be provided to Congress, but the names of the victims to be redacted. It also calls for communications between former Biden officials and the Justice Department related to the Epstein matter, in addition to depositions among some major figures, including" former President Clinton, Hillary Clinton, and former FBI Director James Comey.
- **SENATE SO-SO.** "Two of the three key Senate Republican committee chairs with the power to investigate the Epstein matter," Sens. Rand Paul (R-KY) and Chuck Grassley (R-IA), "said they won't, reflecting a broader lack of interest among many Senate Republicans to pursue the hot-button and evolving issue." (CNN)
- **ADDITIONAL SUBPOENA.** Oversight Committee Chair Rep. James Comer (R-KY 01) "issued a subpoena for" convicted Epstein ally Ghislaine Maxwell "to appear for a deposition" on Aug. 11. (*NOTUS*)

- **INSULT TO INJURY.** “A federal judge on Wednesday rejected one of the Justice’s Departments requests to unseal grand jury transcripts tied to the” Epstein investigations, another “setback for the Trump administration as it seeks to quell growing frustration over its handling of the case.” (*Washington Post*)
- **ADDITIONAL INJURY.** “Attorney General Pam Bondi and her deputy reportedly informed” President Trump “that his name was in the Epstein files.”
- **NOT A DAMNATION.** They told Trump many other high-profile figures were named and they felt the files contained “unverified hearsay about many people, including Trump, who had socialized with Epstein in the past.”
- **REASON FOR DECISION.** They said they did not plan to release additional information because it “contained child pornography and victims’ personal information.” (*Wall Street Journal*)

WHITE HOUSE: Leaked Signal Chats Were Indeed Classified

“The Pentagon’s independent watchdog has received evidence that messages from Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth’s Signal account previewing a U.S. bombing campaign in Yemen were derived from a classified email labeled ‘SECRET/NOFORN’. ... The revelation appears to contradict long-standing claims by the Trump administration that no classified information was divulged in unclassified group chats that critics have called a significant security breach.” (*Washington Post*)

- **SILICON VALLEY REAPS REWARDS.** President Trump’s “AI plan is just the latest administration policy that stands to amplify the fortunes of his Silicon Valley supporters, many of whom publicized their support for him in the wake of the assassination attempt on Trump in Butler, Pennsylvania, last year and donated millions to support his candidacy.” (*Washington Post*)
- **DOGE OFFICIAL DEPARTS.** Antonio Gracias, a high-ranking DOGE official and longtime ally to former Trump adviser Elon Musk, has left the government. (NBC News)

2028 WATCH: Andy Beshear Continues Interstate Appearances

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear (D) will speak to Nebraska Democrats at their annual fundraising event in November. (*Nebraska Examiner*)

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

Roy Cooper plans to enter, Michael Whatley jumps in North Carolina Senate race

By Nicholas Anastácio

BATTLE FOR THE SENATE: The 10 Seats Most Likely to Flip in 2026

Hotline released its initial power rankings of the 10 Senate races most likely to flip during the 2026 cycle. Both Democrats and Republicans are optimistic they can make gains during the midterms, targeting several states across a map with mostly GOP-held seats.

- **TOP FOUR.** North Carolina, Georgia, Maine, and Michigan sit at the top four spots on our list, making up the main battlegrounds on the Senate map. Three of the states were won by President Trump in 2024—two held by Democrats—and one was won by former Vice President Kamala Harris—currently held by the electorally gifted Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME).
- **NEXT STEPS.** Republicans are eyeing other open-seat opportunities as well, including New Hampshire at No. 5 and Minnesota at No. 8. Democrats have a host of red states they're looking to target next year, including Texas at No. 6, Iowa at No. 7, and Alaska at No. 9. All three were won by Trump last year by double-digit margins.
- **WILD CARD RETURNS.** Nebraska takes its place at No. 10 as 2024 candidate Dan Osborn (I) returns to take on Sen. Pete Ricketts (R). Unlike Sen. Deb Fischer (R), "Ricketts has two terms as governor under his belt and is ready to handle an Osborn candidacy from the start." (*Hotline* reporting)
- **MAJORITY LEADER'S STRATEGY.** Majority Leader John Thune's approach to the 2026 midterms could be a combination of Trump and Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Thune's predecessor. Thune said he's "coordinating closely" with the president, giving suggestions on potential candidates.
- **INTERVENTION RETURNS.** "Thune said he's willing to intervene in contested GOP primaries where he thinks a candidate would be doomed in the general election—an old McConnell tactic that sometimes annoyed others in the party." Thune backed 2024 MI SEN nominee Mike Rogers (R) after he jumped in the open race earlier this year. (*Politico*)

PRIMARY ROUNDUP: Trump Goes Easy on GOP Incumbents

"A Trump shift toward forgiving and forgetting lawmakers' past perceived transgressions could have far-reaching implications for his party, especially in Texas and Louisiana."

- **LOUISIANA.** One person close to President Trump suggested he could potentially stay out of the Louisiana GOP primary, helping Sen. Bill Cassidy (R) avoid running against a Trump-backed challenger. Cassidy voted to convict the president during his 2021 impeachment trial.
- **TEXAS.** The same person close to Trump said the president could make an administration offer to state Attorney General Ken Paxton (R), helping Sen. John Cornyn (R) and Republicans at large avoid a nasty GOP primary in the Lone Star State. Cornyn previously questioned Trump's ability to win the 2024 election before the party's presidential primaries. (*Semafor*)

ENDORSEMENT ROUNDUP: Nate Morris Gets First Senator Endorsement

Sen. Jim Banks (R-IN) endorsed waste removal entrepreneur Nate Morris (R) in the GOP primary to replace retiring Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY), dubbing him the "America First" candidate in a race that includes Rep. Andy Barr (R-KY 06) and 2023 KY GOV nominee Daniel Cameron (R). (*The Hill*)

- **VOTE RIGHT!** Defend the Vote, a national group focused on voting rights, released endorsements of Democrats in four Senate races. The organization backed former congressional staffer Jordan Wood (D) in Maine, Rep. Haley Stevens (D-11) in Michigan, Rep. Angie Craig (D-02) in Minnesota, and Rep. Chris Pappas (D-01) in New Hampshire. (*Politico*)
- **FORMER COLLEAGUES.** Rep. Marc Veasey (D-TX 33) endorsed 2024 TX SEN nominee Colin Allred (D) in the Democratic primary to take on Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX). 2022 GOV nominee Beto O'Rourke (D), a former congressman, and Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-20) are considering Senate bids.

GEORGIA: GOP Proxy Fight Emerges

Rep. Buddy Carter (R-01) and Insurance Commissioner John King (R) are both running against Sen. Jon Ossoff (D), and Rep. Mike Collins (R-10) and former Tennessee football Coach Derek Dooley (R) plan to enter in the coming weeks as well, potentially setting up a proxy fight for the future of the Georgia GOP.

- **COALITION IN WAITING.** Dooley represents the Gov. Brian Kemp (R) wing of the party, but Collins is closer to the MAGA wing of the GOP. “The Senate primary could potentially pit” President Trump’s “allies against Kemp’s circle if both candidates enter the race,” making it difficult for Trump and Kemp to coalesce behind the same candidate. (*Punchbowl News*)
- **VOTE SCRUTINY.** Dooley “didn’t vote in multiple presidential elections, never donated to” Trump, “and declined to register as a Republican in several states, a record now drawing scrutiny.” Dooley sat out of the 2016 and 2020 elections according to voter records, but voted in the 2024 election in Georgia—a state that doesn’t require voters to declare a party affiliation. (*Washington Examiner*)

MICHIGAN: Bill Huizenga Leaves Mike Rogers Alone

Rep. Bill Huizenga (R-04) passed on a Senate bid, clearing the way for 2024 nominee Mike Rogers (R) to pursue the GOP nomination. The NRSC and Senate GOP leadership backed Rogers’ candidacy, openly pushing back against Huizenga’s potential challenge. (*Detroit News*)

- **GOTTA GO BUDDY.** “During a recent meeting between” President Trump and Huizenga, “according to three sources familiar with the conversation, Trump directly asked Huizenga not to run for Senate.” (*NOTUS*)
- **COMPETITION ON THE OTHER SIDE.** Several Democrats are competing in the primary to replace retiring Sen. Gary Peters (D), including Rep. Haley Stevens (D-11), state Sen. Mallory McMorrow (D), 2018 GOV candidate Abdul El-Sayed (D), and state Rep. Joe Tate (D).

NORTH CAROLINA: Roy Cooper Plans to Enter, Michael Whatley Jumps In

Former Gov. Roy Cooper (D) is planning to launch a bid next week to replace retiring Sen. Thom Tillis (R).

- **RECRUITMENT SCORE.** Lobbied by national Democrats and the DSCC, Cooper would have a glidepath to the Democratic nomination. Former Rep. Wiley Nickel (D) is currently running in the Democratic primary.
- **NATIONAL RACE.** Once considered a 2024 vice presidential candidate, Cooper is expected to have national money on his side and would initially be favored against a Republican in a general election matchup. (*Axios*)
- **STARTING THE WEEK OFF.** Cooper is expected to announce his campaign as soon as Monday. (*Politico*)
- **SWITCHEROO.** RNC Chairman Michael Whatley will run for the Senate after former RNC co-chair Lara Trump passed on a bid herself. Whatley will have the president’s blessing, helping the former state GOP chair lock up the Republican support.
- **COOPER CAVEAT.** President Trump believes Whatley is well positioned and well connected to take on Cooper, but recognizes it will be an uphill battle for a Republican against the former governor.
- **SONG OF THE SUMMER.** “A public announcement is expected in the next week to 10 days.” (*Politico*)
- **FROM OPERATIVE TO CANDIDATE.** “Whatley has a long history in and around North Carolina politics, but has yet to be a candidate.” Whatley faces 2024 NC-08 candidate Don Brown (R) and businessman Andy Nilsson (R) in the GOP primary. (*Raleigh News & Observer*)
- **IN MIND.** NRSC Chairman Tim Scott reportedly met with Whatley about a Senate bid. “The NRSC has been floating Whatley as a possible replacement for” Tillis “since January.” (*The Hill*)

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION**Missouri could be next state to redraw congressional map**

By James A. Downs and Amelia Monroe

REDISTRICTING ROUNDUP: Trump Presses Missouri to Reconfigure

The White House is “urging Republicans to redraw Missouri’s congressional map to net a seat by targeting” Rep. Emanuel Cleaver (D-05). Cleaver’s Kansas City seat does not have Voting Rights Act protections, making it susceptible to a redraw. Missouri Republicans currently hold a 7-2 advantage in Congress. Gov. Mike Kehoe (R) would have to call a special session.

- **FLASHBACK.** Conservatives in the state pushed for an 8-1 configuration during the 2021 apportionment process but were ultimately unsuccessful. While there “may not be much appetite among some state legislators to redraw mid-decade,” the bully pulpit may change their minds.
- **CLEAVER RESPONDS.** The Kansas City congressman says he’ll run no matter the lines. He said: “I’m a football player. I play football. When you tell me you’re going to run over me, then I become a little more physical. I’m not going to just lay down.” (*Punchbowl News*)
- **NEW SUIT.** A group of voters represented by Elias Law Group filed suit against the Wisconsin Elections Commission “challenging the state’s congressional map as a partisan gerrymander that discriminates against Democrats.” The plaintiffs claim the current Republican-drawn map drew significant amounts of Democrats into two districts. (release)
- **RECALL.** The Wisconsin Supreme Court rejected a similar lawsuit last month—also represented by Elias. The voters filed this case at the Dane County Circuit Court, where another partisan gerrymander case was recently filed as well.
- **ASSESSING OPTIONS.** Democrats “don’t have a ton of options” as it relates to challenging Texas’ efforts to redraw its congressional map. State legislative Democrats could deny a quorum by walking out of the session, but they risk hefty fines and censure. 2022 GOV nominee Beto O’Rourke (D) said Democrats ought to “help fund that cause.” They could also challenge the lawsuits in court, though there are no protections against partisan gerrymandering in the state. Many of the districts potentially under siege, however, are “made up of mostly minority groups.” Racial gerrymandering is illegal. (*Washington Post*)
- **STATES ARE THE FUTURE.** State “Democrats say that the real problem is the party doesn’t do enough to try to flip state legislatures and put Democrats in charge of redrawing the lines in the future.” A donor memo from the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee said the party needs to invest in states ahead of the 2030 redistricting process.
- **DETAILS.** “The memo indicates that 39 of 50 states give state legislatures control over congressional lines, and Republicans have been significantly more successful in controlling statehouses.” The DLCC wants to increase Democratic seats in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin in 2026 and it says Democrats can gain in Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Texas. (*Politico*)
- **TENSIONS HIGH.** Former President Obama will headline an August fundraiser for a Democratic redistricting group that is pushing back on the GOP-led effort to redraw the map in two red states. The move is the latest volley in a back-and-forth battle between the parties over control of Congress.
- **REDISTRICTING RENDEZVOUS.** The Obama-led dinner and discussion is in direct response to Texas Republicans “angling to redraw their state’s maps to more heavily favor their party ahead of the midterms.” The same can be said about Ohio, where similar redistricting efforts are taking place.

Obama's involvement underscores a tumultuous battle for Congress as Republicans have a narrow majority going into 2026, giving Democrats an opportunity to retake control.

- **LEFT-LEANING STRATEGY.** The National Democratic Redistricting Committee has worked to cement a Democratic redistricting strategy across the country. This plan is accompanied with NDRC's promise to "back state-level campaigns in 13 states through 2026." Obama has deep ties to the organization, having raised more than \$1.5 million for the group in 2023, and maintains a close relationship with its chair, Eric Holder, Obama's former attorney general.
- **WARNING SIGNS.** The GOP strategy to redraw maps mid-cycle may be a sticky situation for the party. Democrats have warned that "the GOP stands to spark backlash or potentially draw districts in a way that doesn't account for new voters." (*Politico*)

RACE FOR THE HOUSE: Trump Grasps at Straws for House Support Over Epstein Files

As the release of the Epstein files looms on, President Trump's authority in the House could continue to falter. The House Oversight Committee has promised to issue a slew of subpoenas with the backing of some Republican members.

- **SUBPOENA SETBACK.** Republicans on the Oversight committee originally tried to "soften the blow" from Democratic-led subpoenas by agreeing to include former President Clinton and first lady Hillary Clinton for their alleged friendship with the financier in the process. But, relying on House Republicans may not be a plausible cushion for Trump to lay on anymore as some GOP members switch sides.
- **WHY THE SWITCH UP?** Republicans have effectively been backed into a corner over the Epstein issue. For the last decade, Republicans have piggybacked off Trump's urging that Epstein was a part of "an insidious pedophile ring that included top government officials, Democrats, and business leaders." Democrats have also taken advantage of the opportunity by forcing Republicans to vote on the issue repeatedly. (*Punchbowl News*)

CALIFORNIA 03: Democratic Poll Shows Close Contest

A Tulchin Research poll (July 8-10; 400 LVs; +/-4.9%) conducted internally for Nevada County Supervisor Heidi Hall (D) found Hall and Rep. Kevin Kiley (R) in a statistical tie. Kiley led Hall within the margin of error, 47%-45%, with 8% undecided. Kiley's favorability ratings were split down the middle: 45% favorable and 45% unfavorable. 10% didn't know.

- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** Kiley won by 11 points last year and no poll at any point showed a statistical tie, a source familiar told *Hotline*. President Trump won this district by about 4 points. The seat is a House Majority PAC and EMILYs List target but is not currently on the DCCC's district in play list. The poll, though internal, could reflect some dissatisfaction among Republicans as Democrats lead on the generic ballot. As the lines stand, it might be a tough lift, but Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) has threatened redistricting to combat the Texas plan. Potential changes to this district could include bringing parts of the Sacramento area into this otherwise sprawling Death Valley seat. (*Hotline* reporting)

KENTUCKY 04: Massie Fires Back

Rep. Thomas Massie (R) fired back at "the swamp" in a new ad, alleging they spent \$1.8 million on attack ads against him. The attack ads Massie is referencing criticized his no vote on the OBBB and call to release the Epstein files.

- **MASSIE SAYS:** "I'm sure you've seen the attack ads by now. Look, it's simple, they're attacking me because I'm holding the Washington machine accountable." (X)

- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** Massie has become public enemy No. 1 of the Trump administration after opposing some of the president's agenda. Veteran Trump campaign operatives have started to run ads in Kentucky and are actively recruiting a primary challenger in hopes of defeating Massie, who has drawn the ire of President Trump in previous cycles but staved off primaries.

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

Winsome Earle-Sears names new campaign manager

By Abby Turner

STATE OF THE STATES: Dem Govs Frustrated Over NGA's Response to Trump

"Some Democratic members of the" National Governors Association "have privately been fuming in recent months over the organization's tepid reaction to" President Trump's "federal incursions into state matters," saying "the group did not respond forcefully enough."

- **WON'T RENEW.** "At least two Democratic governors," Govs. Laura Kelly (D-KS) and Tim Walz (D-MN), "plan to stop paying dues to the organization this month when they are asked to renew their membership." (*The Atlantic*)

FLORIDA: Casey DeSantis, Byron Donalds Statistically Tied in New Poll

A poll (July 14-22; 797 RVs; +/-3.9%) by the University of North Florida's Public Opinion Research Lab found first lady Casey DeSantis (R) and Rep. Byron Donalds (R-19) in a statistical tie, 32%-29%. Former Rep. Matt Gaetz (R) had 8%, Miami Mayor Francis Suarez (R) had 2%, and state Agriculture Commissioner Wilton Simpson (R) had 1%. 7% said they would vote for someone else and 18% were unsure. (*Tampa Bay Times*)

- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** Donalds' early frontrunner status could be in jeopardy if Florida's first lady enters the race, but expect Gov. Ron DeSantis' (R) eventual pick for the lieutenant governor vacancy to shake up the race even more.
- **JOLLY JUGGLES PAST.** "Scrutiny over" former Rep. David Jolly's (D) "opposition to abortion when he was in Congress, which he has since renounced, is emerging as the first major test before him as he works to convince Democrats that he's now one of them."
- **DEMOCRATIC DIVISIONS.** "The issue threatens to splinter party unity even as Jolly has yet to face any major challenger on the Democratic ticket. And Jolly's defenders, who have rushed to back him publicly, are concerned that beating down the lone major Democratic candidate could provide yet another hurdle in an already difficult race for the beleaguered state party." (*Politico*)

MICHIGAN: Justice Department Requests State's Voter Registration Records

President Trump's "Justice Department is asking the top election official in the key battleground state of Michigan for access to voter registration records and demanding information about its efforts to kick ineligible voters off the rolls." It's the most recent "development in the Trump administration's effort to gather data on voters around the country," particularly in swing states. (CNN)

NEW YORK: Republicans Turn to Elise Stefanik, Bruce Blakeman

Rep. Mike Lawler's (R-17) "decision Wednesday to forgo a gubernatorial campaign effectively ceded the field to" Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-21) and Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman (R), "two MAGA-infused Republicans closely allied with the president." Lawler "was widely considered to be the most competitive challenger to" Gov. Kathy Hochul (D). "Now Republicans, desperate to reclaim statewide power, will place a high-stakes wager on either Stefanik or Blakeman—with" President Trump "potentially picking the winner." (*Politico*)

VIRGINIA: Winsome Earle-Sears Taps New Campaign Manager

Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears (R) "is bringing on a new campaign manager," Corey Barsky, who is a "Pennsylvania-based political strategist." He "has already been serving as a senior adviser for the campaign" while working as "a strategist at the political consulting firm ColdSpark."

- **BYE BYE BYE.** The campaign announced last week that Earle-Sears' former campaign manager, Will Archer, moved to a different role on the campaign. (CNN)
- **GETTIN' THE BAND TOGETHER.** Earle-Sears, talk show host John Reid (R), and state Attorney General Jason Miyares (R) launched a GOP Victory Campaign in the state to "mobilize voters from every corner of our Commonwealth and deliver wins, from the Governor's Mansion to town council chambers." Earle-Sears' is dedicating "staff and strategic resources" for a statewide field operation. (release)

OVERLOOKED

Politician to Author Pipeline

By Amelia Monroe

The politician to author pipeline seems to be an almost inevitable succession of careers for those that hold public office. Former President Biden recently made headlines for the sale of his presidential memoir with a price tag of nearly \$10 million. While it's an impressive advance, it pales in comparison to some of his predecessors. In 2017, it was widely reported that former President Obama and former first lady Michelle Obama sold rights to multiple books for upwards of \$60 million. Former President Clinton had a similar success story for his 2004 memoir *My Life*, which got him nearly \$15 million. While it's not a millions of dollar sales price, senators have also made hundreds of thousands for book rights and royalties. Sen. Raphael Warnock (D-GA) made \$460,000 in royalties in 2023, Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) got a book deal for two books, earning \$1.1 million in 2022, and Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) effectively doubled his congressional salary through his book sales in 2022.