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# Hotline: July 22, 2025

## SPOTLIGHT

### Countering State-Level Super PAC Influence May Backfire

**As outside spending grows, states look to empower state parties.**

By Abby Turner

In an effort to counteract the rising influence of outside spending in statewide elections, a growing number of states are proposing to ease limits on political party contributions to candidates.

In Kansas, Gov. Laura Kelly (D) signed a law this spring scrapping caps on political party contributions to general-election candidates. A task force in Oklahoma proposed more aggressive changes: lifting contribution limits for both individuals and parties and raising caps for PACs. In Tennessee, a state senator introduced a bill to erase limits for parties and party caucuses altogether.

Supporters of these changes say they are necessary to level the playing field against deep-pocketed super PACs and out-of-state donors flooding statewide contests. Not everyone agrees.

“You're not going to stop the PAC activity,” Common Cause Vice President of States Heather Ferguson told *Hotline*. “You're not going to put that horse back in the barn.”

Alternatively, such proposals could backfire. Patrick Llewellyn, the Campaign Legal Center's director of state campaign finance, told *Hotline* that removing limits on political parties could increase both the reality and appearance of corruption at the state level. Wealthy donors who donate large sums to state political parties may be emboldened to dictate which candidates those parties support.

He added that better-enforced coordination rules would go a long way toward solving the problem.

“The answer to that is not to just open the floodgates of unlimited big money to the parties, but to appropriately police coordination between big outside spenders and candidates,” Llewellyn said.

Rather than doing away with limits all together, Ferguson said that contribution limits should increase regularly to reflect rising campaign costs. The cost of gubernatorial races has skyrocketed, with Pennsylvania's 2022 race topping \$100 million and Wisconsin's surpassing \$164 million.

"We are seeing campaign costs increase every single election cycle, and sometimes they double or triple, and that is just continuing to outweigh the voice and drown out the voice of everyday Americans," Ferguson said.

— *Abby Turner*

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## Quote of the Day

"If a divorce proceeding and a not-so-friendly divorce ... disqualifies a person to be a member of Congress, I don't think we could establish a quorum up here." — Rep. Troy Nehls (R-TX 22) on Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton's (R) divorce and alleged infidelity, Washington Post, 7/21.

## HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

### Andy Beshear to appear on cover of Vogue

By Erika Filter

#### DEMOCRATS: Hunter Biden Goes Rogue

In a new three-hour podcast, Hunter Biden unleashed "a profane tirade against a host of perceived enemies, including the senior Biden aide Anita Dunn," Democratic strategists David Axelrod and James Carville, journalist Jake Tapper, and longtime celebrity Democratic fundraiser George Clooney.

- **SLEEPY JOE.** He also claimed his father, former President Biden, "had been given the prescription sleep aid Ambien before his fateful debate to help him rest after two European trips and a political fund-raiser in Los Angeles in the preceding weeks." (*New York Times*)

#### WHITE HOUSE: WSJ Reporter Removed from Press Pool

President Trump "followed up his lawsuit against *The Wall Street Journal* over last week's" story regarding convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein "by banishing one of the newspaper's reporters from Air Force One for an upcoming Scotland trip."

- **HOSTILITIES PERSIST.** "The moves reflect Trump's aggressiveness toward media who displease him." (AP)

## 2028 WATCH: Andy Beshear to Appear on Cover of Vogue

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear (D) will appear on the cover of the September issue of *Vogue*.

- **HOW DOES HE DO IT?** The magazine describes his governing style as “hyper-organized, well-rehearsed, on message, and largely drama-free.”
- **TALK TO THEM.** Beshear credits his success in the state, despite the Republican supermajority in the Legislature regularly overruling his veto power, as coming from the fact that he regularly talks to Republicans.
- **BESHEAR SAYS:** “They’re still our neighbors and our friends. ... And most Trump voters aren’t thinking about politics or partisanship for the vast majority of their day. They’re thinking about their job and their family and whether they can support them.” (*Vogue*)

## HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

### Several Ken Paxton backers question support amid divorce, alleged infidelity

By Nicholas Anastácio

#### PRIMARY ROUNDUP: GOP Appointees Likely to Avoid Primary Drama

Sens. Ashley Moody (R-FL) and Jon Husted (R-OH) are likely to avoid GOP primary challenges after being appointed to succeed Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Vice President JD Vance, respectively, in the Senate this year.

- **FLORIDA.** Moody, who’s handedly won two state attorney general elections, has deepened her ties with President Trump’s allies. A Moody-aligned super PAC has Trump adviser Chris LaCivita and Trump pollster Tony Fabrizio on board.
- **OTHER WORRIES.** Rep. Cory Mills (R-07) was considering entering the GOP primary against Moody, but the congressman “is now facing his own brewing scandal related to a lawsuit seeking his eviction over alleged failure to pay thousands of dollars in rent at a property in Washington, D.C.”
- **OHIO.** Trump endorsed Husted earlier this year, helping the former lieutenant governor to Gov. Mike DeWine (R) rack up early endorsements from the state GOP and Ohio Chamber of Commerce.
- **CHANGE OF PLANS.** Husted was prepared to run for governor until DeWine appointed him to the Senate, avoiding a primary battle against 2024 presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy (R). The senator said the statewide office switch still benefits him, especially as his team remains activated to help him run in next year’s special election. (NBC News)
- **NEW HAMPSHIRE.** President Trump’s aides are “trying to land a recruit in the race” to replace retiring Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D). Rep. Chris Pappas (D-01) has a glidepath to the Democratic nomination at the moment as former Sen. Scott Brown (R-MA) and state Sen. Dan Innis (R) battle to become the GOP nominee. (*Axios*)
- **SOUTH CAROLINA.** Sen. Lindsey Graham (R) is looking to avoid a serious primary challenge from former Lt. Gov. André Bauer (R) and businessman Mark Lynch (R) next year, touting his Trump endorsement to state and county Republicans. 2022 SC-01 nominee Annie Andrews (D) is looking to power through a crowded Democratic primary, relying on veteran campaign staffers from former DNC Chair Jaime Harrison’s 2020 bid against Graham. (*Columbia State*)

## ENDORSEMENT ROUNDUP: Trump Endorses Dan Sullivan, Mike Rounds

President Trump endorsed Sens. Dan Sullivan (R-AK) and Mike Rounds (R-SD) for reelection, going back on a 2022 promise that he wouldn't endorse Rounds for reelection again. (Truth Social/Truth Social)

- **FIVE FINGERS.** The president has not endorsed Sens. Ashley Moody (R-FL), Joni Ernst (R-IA), Bill Cassidy (R-LA), Susan Collins (R-ME), and John Cornyn (R-TX) for reelection next year. (*Hotline* reporting)
- **TEXAS DEM PRIMARY.** 2020 TX-21 nominee Wendy Davis (D), a former state senator and the Democratic nominee against Gov. Greg Abbott (R) in 2014, endorsed 2024 nominee Colin Allred (D) in the Democratic primary. (release)
- **TEXAS GOP PRIMARY.** The Texas Municipal Police Association and the Combined Law Enforcement Association of America, the state's two largest law enforcement organizations, endorsed Cornyn over state Attorney General Ken Paxton (R) in the Republican primary. The National Border Patrol Council and 20 border-county sheriffs endorsed the senator for reelection last week. (release)

## GEORGIA: Mike Collins Inching Towards Run, Rich McCormick Out

Rep. Mike Collins (R-10) is getting closer to launching a Senate bid against Sen. Jon Ossoff (D), hinting at a run in a X post captioned: "Tires kicked. Fueling up."

- **COMING SOON.** "A person familiar with the Collins campaign told *Politico* on Monday that Collins is likely to announce a run for the seat soon." (*Politico*)
- **ONE LESS REP.** Rep. Rich McCormick (R-07) has ruled out a Senate bid, according to a senior aide to the congressman. (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*)
- **THE GOP FIELD.** The GOP primary currently includes Rep. Buddy Carter (R-01) and Insurance Commissioner John King (R) and could see former Tennessee football Coach Derek Dooley (R) jumping in.

## NORTH CAROLINA: GOP Poll Shows Neck-and-Neck Race

A co/efficient poll (July 10-14; 694 LVs; +/-3.7%) found a generic Democrat neck-and-neck with a generic Republican, 46%-44%, with 10% undecided in the open Senate race.

- **THE WRITING ON THE WALL.** The survey, conducted after Sen. Thom Tillis (R) announced his retirement, found former Gov. Roy Cooper (D) ahead of the senator, 49%-31%, in a head-to-head contest. State Attorney General Jeff Jackson (D) led Tillis, 41%-27%, in the same poll.
- **FAVORABILITY AND TRUST.** Cooper had a more positive favorability split, 45%-38%, than Tillis, 18%-56%. The poll also found that North Carolina voters trust Republicans more than Democrats, 46%-38%, to handle the nation's economy.
- **HYPOTHETICALS.** In a matchup between Cooper and "a Republican supporter of the Trump agenda to cut taxes, secure our border, and eliminate government waste," the poll showed both candidates at 48% each. (release)
- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** Tillis' vote against the OBBB doomed his chances of reelection, especially in a scenario where Democrats recruited Cooper. The open race gives Republicans an opportunity to run a fresh candidate and Democrats a chance to win their first Senate seat in the state since 2008.

## TEXAS: Ken Paxton's Divorce Has Some Supporters Splitting

Several backers of state Attorney General Ken Paxton's (R) challenge against Sen. John Cornyn (R) are rethinking their support following state Sen. Angela Paxton's (R) divorce from him.

- **RESCINDED.** Texas Values, a group focused on advancing "family values" through policy, dropped its endorsement of Ken Paxton following allegations of adultery in Angela Paxton's divorce filing. The group's president, Jonathan Saenz, said: "There's no question that adultery is an attack on marriage."
- **CONFLICTED.** GOP political analyst Zach Barrett said local Republicans from the McKinney area, including his mother, told him they wouldn't vote for Ken Paxton because of the alleged adultery. Barrett said he'd choose Ken Paxton over Cornyn in the primary, but said he likes Rep. Wesley Hunt (R-38). (*Washington Post*)

## HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

### New Jersey governor declines redistricting for now but doesn't rule it out in the future

By James A. Downs and Amelia Monroe

#### RACE FOR THE HOUSE: Dems Factor Tariffs Into Midterm Message

DCCC Chair Suzan DelBene previewed the Democratic message regarding President Trump's tariff plan. DelBene said that tariffs affect the price of goods and will raise costs on families. She said "the number one issue across the country is lowering costs." The message will focus on how tariffs create uncertainty for businesses. (*Washington Post*)

#### REDISTRICTING ROUNDUP: New Jersey Won't Redistrict, For Now

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy (D) "said Monday that there are no plans to redraw the state's congressional map, but he also didn't rule out the possibility." The state has been mentioned as a Democratic opportunity to redraw the maps as GOP-led Texas prepares to reconfigure its lines to make them more GOP friendly.

- **LEGAL HURDLE.** The Garden State would likely have to change its constitution, as it currently forbids mid-decade redistricting. Democrats currently hold nine of 12 congressional seats. (*New Jersey Globe*)
- **JAM SHOT.** Texas Republicans plan to withhold votes on measures related to the deadly flooding earlier this month until they pass a new redistricting plan in order to block potential Democratic efforts to resist the maps. Several state House Democrats urged Republican leadership to take up flood legislation before redistricting.
- **DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD.** "Voting on new congressional maps before any response to the Hill Country floods could create a political liability for Republicans, who control all levels of Texas government." Voting on the maps could dissuade Democrats from potentially walking out to deny a quorum, which would also impede flood relief. (*New York Times*)
- **BULLY BALL.** Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) "was initially resistant to the plan pushed by" the White House because he did not want to resist the members of the delegation, some of whom have expressed uncertainty about the plans. After White House officials couldn't convince Abbott, President

Trump called the governor and he added the item to the special session.

- **VIEW FROM THE GOV MANSION.** A source in Abbott's world said he was not reluctant about redistricting, and a spokesperson declined comment about the details of Abbott's conversation with Trump. (*Texas Tribune*)
- **NOT TOUCHING THAT ONE.** Members of the Texas delegation "say they're trying to stay out of a new push to redraw the state's congressional map" to avoid influencing the proceedings. (*Politico*)
- **GOP EXPLORES OTHER OPTIONS.** President Trump told reporters last week up to five other states could pursue mid-cycle redistricting to help pad the GOP's narrow majority. Missouri Republicans could crack Kansas City, as Rep. Emanuel Cleaver's (D-05) seat does not have Voting Rights Act protections. Florida could eye five Democratic-held seats as the state has rapidly transformed into a deep-red hotbed.
- **MORE ON THE LIST.** Indiana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Kansas, and Kentucky all could look to split Democratic seats, but could be met with resistance by governors or legislatures. (*Punchbowl News*)

## ARIZONA 02: 2024 Democratic Nominee Returns for a Run

2024 nominee Jonathan Nez (D) launched a rematch bid against Rep. Eli Crane (R). Nez, a former president of the Navajo Nation, overperformed in a deep-red district despite minimal outside investment. President Trump carried the district by 15 points, but Crane won by 9 points. (*Navajo Times*)

- **EYE ON THE PRIZE.** The DCCC has made the district, which covers more than half of the state by area, a new target for this cycle.

## CALIFORNIA 09: Potential Rematch Awaits

2024 nominee Kevin Lincoln (R) launched another run against Rep. Josh Harder (D). Lincoln, the former mayor of Stockton, the district's largest city, is also a Marine Corps veteran. (release)

- **ON THE RACE.** Harder defeated Lincoln by about 4 points as the district shifted to President Trump this cycle. The president carried the seat by about 2 points. GOP sources have told *Hotline* they are bullish on this seat this cycle.

## IOWA 02: Pastor Runs From the Pulpit

Pastor Clint Twedt-Ball (D) announced his run for Congress against Rep. Ashley Hinson (R). Twedt-Ball touted his long-time nonprofit experience, which has provided essential resources including housing, disaster aid, and investment to low-income communities throughout the state.

- **TWEDT-BALL SAYS:** "For over two decades, I've worked to pull people of all perspectives together to solve everyday problems—block by block, family by family, putting our faith in action." (release)
- **THE FIELD.** Twedt-Bell joins retired Army nurse Kathy Dolter (D) in the race for the Democratic nomination. Twedt-Bell is one of two pastors to eye the race including state Rep. Lindsay James (D), a pastor from Dubuque, who said she is considering a run.

## NEBRASKA 02: Race for Bacon's Seat Starts to Sizzle

Douglas County District County Clerk Crystal Rhoades (D) officially joined the crowded Democratic primary to succeed retiring Rep. Don Bacon (R). Rhoades has previous experience working as a political consultant, where she helped local Democrats win elections including Omaha Mayor John Ewing Jr. (D), who became the first Democrat to lead the state's largest city in nearly a decade.

- **HEATING UP.** Rhoades will take on at least five other Democratic candidates in a contentious primary for the party nomination including state Sen. John Cavanaugh (D), political operative Denise Powell (D), and Navy veteran Kishla Askins (D). Recent FEC filings show Powell outraising Cavanaugh. The district has maintained a slight Republican lean during Bacon's tenure, but the *Cook Political Report with Amy Walker* has shifted the race to Lean Democrat. (*Nebraska Examiner*)

### **TEXAS 34: Eric Flores Joins Republican Coalition to Unseat Gonzalez**

Army veteran Eric Flores (R) is the latest to launch his campaign against Rep. Vicente Gonzalez (D). The Gulf Coast district is a key battleground for the House majority and a primary target for the Republican party.

- **REDISTRICTING EFFECT.** The district is one of 26 midterm races the NRCC is eyeing in 2026. It could be a key pickup opportunity for the Republican party after President Trump won the district by more than 5 points in 2024, a major shift from former President Biden's 15 point win in 2020. But redistricting efforts made by the GOP-dominated state Legislature may put Gonzalez even more at risk. The move would reduce the number of marginally Democratic-led districts, which Gonzalez criticized, calling the Republican-led special session "cheating." (Fox News)

*Yesterday's edition mischaracterized a statement from NRCC Chairman Richard Hudson about Texas redistricting.*

## **HOTLINE LATEST EDITION**

### **State Sen. Ethan Corson enters Kansas gubernatorial race as second Democrat**

By Abby Turner

#### **STATE OF THE STATES: DGA-Commissioned Poll Shows GOP Bill Unpopular in VA, NJ**

Two polls in Virginia (July 9-10; 582 RVs; +/-4%) and New Jersey (July 9-10; 541 RVs; +/-4.2%) by Public Policy Polling and commissioned by the DGA found 67% of Virginia voters and 61% of New Jersey voters said that the GOP reconciliation bill is "harmful because it cuts Medicaid and SNAP to pay for tax cuts for the rich, while adding to the deficit." In Virginia, 54% oppose the bill and 35% support it. In the Garden State, 53% oppose the bill and 36% support it. (release)

- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** Virginia and New Jersey are emerging as early test cases for how Democrats frame the GOP-backed spending cuts on the campaign trail. Former Rep. Abigail Spanberger (D-VA) and Rep. Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ 11) are leaning heavily into blaming Republicans for cuts to Medicaid and SNAP benefits. The poll shows voters resonating with the message. However, the most major cuts won't kick in until at least 2027, timing that complicates Democrats' messaging. Candidates are warning about future pain voters won't feel immediately. Blaming Republicans may stir voters

in the immediate aftermath of the bill, but if Democrats want to make delayed cuts feel urgent in 2025, they'll need to offer clear solutions to the cuts they condemn.

### **FLORIDA: Jay Collins Hints at Gubernatorial Bid While Considered for Lt. Gov. Vacancy**

“Amid ongoing speculation that he may get tapped as Florida’s next lieutenant governor,” state Sen. Jay Collins (R) “keeps saying things that suggest he may run for the top job in 2026.”

- **NOT BACKING BYRON.** Gov. Ron DeSantis (R), who will soon fill the vacant lieutenant governor’s seat, may “wind up backing someone else in a potential Republican primary against” Rep. Byron Donalds (R-19). “Collins could get a boost in a potential campaign if he was appointed second-in-command by DeSantis.” (*Politico*)

### **GEORGIA: Ethics Commission Rejects Chris Carr’s Complaint Against Burt Jones**

“The State Ethics Commission has rejected a complaint by” state Attorney General Chris Carr (R) “seeking an investigation into the source of a \$10 million loan” Lt. Gov. Burt Jones (R) “made to his own gubernatorial campaign.” The commission declined to investigate because the complaint by Carr “‘fails to allege a violation’ of Georgia campaign finance laws.”

- **NOT DONE YET.** Another request Carr filed is still pending. He asked “for an advisory opinion from the ethics commission on whether a candidate can issue a personal loan to a leadership committee to fund their campaigns.” (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*)

### **KANSAS: Another Democrat Enters Race to Succeed Kelly**

State Sen. Ethan Corson (D) launched his campaign for governor today in the race to succeed term-limited Gov. Laura Kelly (D). He’ll face fellow state Sen. Cindy Holscher (D) in the Democratic primary. (*Kansas Reflector*)

- **LT GOV PASSES ON BID.** Lt. Gov. David Toland (D) announced he will not run for governor, or any other elected office in 2026, passing on a bid to succeed Kelly. Toland, also the state’s commerce secretary, said he will remain focused on the state’s economy and economic development projects. (*Topeka Capital-Journal*)

### **NEVADA: Washoe County Commissioner Chair To Launch Campaign Next Month**

Washoe County Commissioner Chair Alexis Hill (D) said she is running to challenge Gov. Joe Lombardo (R) and will officially announce her campaign next month. State Attorney General Aaron Ford (D), who announced his intention to run in December, is also running in the Democratic primary. (*Las Vegas Review-Journal*)

- **LOMBARDO FACES BILL IMPACT.** “The implementation of the” GOP reconciliation bill will play a key role in Nevada, where Lombardo “is seen as the most vulnerable Republican governor up for re-election.”
- **FEW OPTIONS.** The impacts of the reconciliation bill “on that budget and the state’s broader finances” when one in three are Nevadans on Medicaid “could be even more significant than in many others because Nevada has no state income tax, and therefore is extremely limited in how it can find new revenues.” (NBC News)



## VIRGINIA: Winsome Earle-Sears' New Ad Casts Doubt on Opponents' Moderate Title

A new ad from Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears' (R) campaign is attacking former Rep. Abigail Spanberger's (D) stance as “a fake moderate.” The spot features Spanberger saying she considers “myself to be a progressive” and hits her for her stance on a border wall, renewable energy, and immigration. (release)

- **IN ADS AND ON AIRWAVES.** Spanberger “is spending about nine times as much money on digital ads and emails as” Earle-Sears, but the Republican gubernatorial nominee is spending more on television ads. (WVTF)
- **NOW ON SUBSTACK.** Talk show host John Reid (R) launched a Substack called *The Reid Revolution* to “engage directly with supporters” as he runs for lieutenant governor. The Substack will publish on a weekly basis. (*The Hill*)

## WISCONSIN: Tom Tiffany Teases Gubernatorial Bid with Fishing Picture

Rep. Tom Tiffany (R-07) “has not yet said whether he plans to join the GOP primary for governor” but teased a run on his X account.

- **FISH PIC.** He responded to an X account asking that all Wisconsin gubernatorial candidates prove they know how to properly hold a fish by posting a picture of him holding a fish.
- **BEHIND THE SCENES.** “He's hinted at a potential statewide campaign in more concrete ways: The website domain name ‘tomtiffanyforgovernor.com’ leads directly to his current congressional campaign site. That site's homepage labels Tiffany a ‘proven conservative for Wisconsin.’” (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*)

## OVERLOOKED

### The White House Press Pool

By Amelia Monroe

President Trump's second term has been fraught with incessant attacks against press coverage of the White House and his presidency. Most recently, Trump took aim at the *Wall Street Journal*, barring the publication from attending his trip to Scotland for its coverage of the Epstein files. The move is Trump's latest hit at the press pool, which has covered the oval office at close range for nearly a century. The group works in tandem with the White House Correspondents' Association, providing essential media coverage to smaller outlets that don't have access to the nation's highest office. Its name, “press pool” was dubbed after President Roosevelt's time, who often waded and spoke from the offices' west terrace pool. Eventually, President Nixon ordered the addition of a press briefing room directly above the old pool to accommodate for growing media demands. The room has gone through many variations since then, but it has consistently provided open access to national and regional publications.