



NATIONAL JOURNAL

Hotline: July 23, 2025

SPOTLIGHT

Lara Trump's Senate Suspense

President Trump's daughter-in-law has yet another chance to get to the Senate.

By Nicholas Anastácio

Former RNC co-chair Lara Trump is on the cusp of becoming the second Trump to pursue elected office, gifted with a runway to pursue the Senate seat vacated by retiring Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC).

Despite living with her family in Florida, the president's daughter-in-law has the right of first refusal for the GOP nomination in her native state. RNC Chairman Michael Whatley, a former North Carolina GOP chair, said he and "the entire Republican universe" would back Lara Trump if she ran for the Senate; NRCC Chairman Richard Hudson, representing NC-09, ruled out a bid quickly; and Rep. Pat Harrigan (R-NC 10), regarded as a high-tier replacement for Tillis on the GOP ticket, said he would endorse Lara Trump if she entered the race.

"She's been campaigning here a lot, dating back to 2015," said Jonathan Felts, a campaign adviser to Sen. Ted Budd (R-NC) in 2022. "She's seen as a hometown girl. She's not seen as an outsider."

Lara Trump has been floated for various offices since her father-in-law's 2016 election, passing on each one. A 2019 Club for Growth poll found her dominating the open 2020 NY-02 Republican primary while she lived with her husband, Eric Trump, in New York City. She was considered a contender for former North Carolina Sen. Richard Burr's (R) seat in 2022, leading in early primary polls. Several Republicans, including Florida Sen. Rick Scott (R), pushed for her to be appointed to the Senate seat vacated by Secretary of State Marco Rubio earlier this year.

Carter Wrenn, a veteran North Carolina GOP consultant responsible for the elections of several Tar Heel State senators, told *Hotline* that Lara Trump's relationship to the president, her political and fundraising connections, and her last name could help her lock up Republican support. He added that her last name could also burden her in a general election, especially if the 2026 midterms become a rebuke of the current administration.

"The fact that she's a Trump is the problem because that'll hurt her with independent voters and swing voters," Wrenn said.

President Trump's children, particularly former White House senior adviser Ivanka Trump and podcaster Donald Trump Jr., have been dubbed the likely heirs to his decadelong political career. That title could belong to his daughter-in-law instead if she finally runs for the Senate.

Lara Trump said she plans to decide if she'll enter the race by Thanksgiving, but state law would require her to move back to North Carolina by late September in order to meet the 90-day party affiliation requirement before the December candidate filing deadline.

— *Nicholas Anastácio*

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Quote of the Day

"He just told us in there to stick their heads in the sand about this Epstein thing." — Rep. Thomas Massie (R-KY 04) after Republicans' weekly conference meeting with Speaker Mike Johnson, New York Times, 7/22.

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

Tim Walz says he won't run in 2028 if he seeks reelection

By Erika Filter

DEMOCRATS: Party Looks to the Past for How to Rise Again

"For Democrats distraught about the state of their party nine months after President Trump recaptured the presidency—who are mired in infighting over why they lost, how the party should change to become competitive again and who might lead them" back to power—former President Clinton's rise in the 1990s "offers a glimmer of hope."

- **PATIENCE.** "The Democrats' rebuilding process in the 1980s took nearly a decade, and followed debilitating ideological battles pitting the party's liberal establishment against moderates, many of whom came from what were already becoming red states." (*New York Times*)

REPUBLICANS: Vance Rakes in \$3M

"Vice President JD Vance headlined a big-ticket fundraiser Tuesday on Nantucket, raking in \$3 million in donations for Republicans as the 2026 midterm elections draw closer." (*New York Post*)

WHITE HOUSE: Trump Calls on DOJ to Investigate Obama

President Trump “called on the Justice Department to investigate” former President Obama, saying, “It’s time to start, after what they did to me, and whether it’s right or wrong, it’s time to go after people.”

- **THE USUAL SUSPECTS.** Trump also mentioned Hillary Clinton and former President Biden as wrongdoers.
- **OBAMA SPEAKS OUT.** In a rare rebuke, a spokesperson for Obama “called Trump’s claims ‘outrageous’ and ‘ridiculous.’” (*Wall Street Journal*)
- **TRUMP DEFENDS TECH.** “The Trump administration is using its global trade wars to advance the interests of the U.S. technology industry, seeking to prevent foreign countries from targeting American internet firms.” (*Wall Street Journal*)

2028 WATCH: Tim Walz Says No 2028 Run if He Seeks Reelection

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz (D) “says he won’t run for president in 2028 if he seeks a third term as governor next year.”

- **WATCH THIS SPACE.** “Walz is expected to announce his plans after the Minnesota State Fair wraps up in September.” (*Axios Twin Cities*)
- **COASTAL ELITE GOES INLAND.** “In swing states where only a few Democrats have mastered making inroads in small, right-leaning, rural communities, a West Coast background could put” California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) “at a disadvantage.” (*NOTUS*)
- **GOVERNORS ON EDGE WITH UNIONS.** President Trump’s “appeal among working-class voters was already upending the historical alliance between Democrats and unions. Now, a tough budget season has put some of the party’s aspiring talent deep into bargaining negotiations that are creating new fissures in a Democratic coalition that hasn’t yet coalesced around a message for 2026, let alone 2028.”
- **A DIVERGING COALITION.** “Unions, which often play difficult with Democrats before backing them anyway, are warning that workers are increasingly cynical of both parties. Groups like the International Brotherhood of Teamsters opted not to endorse a presidential candidate last cycle, despite their previous support for Democratic candidates.” (*Politico*)

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

Steve Marshall's internal shows him ahead in Alabama Senate GOP primary

By Nicholas Anastácio

BATTLE FOR THE SENATE: One Nation Promotes OBBB Tax Cuts

One Nation, the issue advocacy arm of the GOP-aligned SLF, is launching an eight-figure ad buy highlighting the “Working Family Tax Cuts” in the OBBB. Spots will air on broadcast, cable, and digital.

- **NATIONAL.** A nationwide ad touts Majority Leader John Thune and Senate Republicans’ work on the policy package, adding that GOP senators “protected Medicaid for Americans, not illegals.”
- **FIVE STATES.** State-specific ads thank Sens. Dan Sullivan (R-AK), Ashley Moody (R-FL), Jon Husted (R-OH), Lindsey Graham (R-SC), and Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) for passing the OBBB in their home states. (Fox News)
- **LOOK UNDER YOUR SEAT.** NRSC Chairman Tim Scott announced at the Senate GOP lunch on Tuesday that the majority party’s campaign arm will contribute more than \$1.1 million in maxed-out donations of \$62,000 to each in-cycle GOP incumbent. (*Punchbowl News*)

ALABAMA: Steve Marshall Ahead in Internal GOP Primary Poll

A McLaughlin & Associates poll (July 14-17; 600 LVs; +/-4.0%) conducted for state Attorney General Steve Marshall (R) found him ahead in a three-person GOP primary field to succeed outgoing Sen. Tommy Tuberville (R). Marshall got 35%, Rep. Barry Moore (R-01) got 12%, and former Navy SEAL Jared Hudson (R) got 9%. 44% were undecided.

- **NAME ID.** Marshall has the highest name recognition among his GOP competitors at 80%. The poll found Moore's name ID at 56% and Hudson's name ID at 39%. (*1819 News*)
- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** The only elected official in the race so far, Marshall is in strong contention to win the GOP nomination for the open seat. Moore jumping into the race could make the primary more competitive, but he would still face challenges running against a statewide official.

IOWA: Zach Wahls Boasts Dem Endorsements

State Sen. Zach Wahls (D) touted a list of more than 45 endorsements from prominent Iowans as he looks to win the Democratic primary to take on Sen. Joni Ernst (R). The list includes former Rep. Dave Loebsack (D), former Lt. Gov. Patty Judge (D)—the 2016 Democratic Senate nominee, and 2022 IA-01 nominee Liz Mathis (D), a state senator. (X)

- **UNCLEAR NOMINEE.** Wahls is competing against former Knoxville Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Nathan Sage (D) and 2020 IA-04 nominee J.D. Scholten (D) for the Democratic nomination. State Rep. Josh Turek (D) and Des Moines School Board Chair Jackie Norris (D) are considering bids.

NORTH CAROLINA: Roy Cooper Continues Fundraising

Former Gov. Roy Cooper (D) “is ramping up his political fundraising efforts, with a focus on national politics—another sign the Democrat could be close to announcing a plan to run” to replace retiring Sen. Thom Tillis (R).

- **YOU'VE GOT MAIL.** In a recent fundraising email to his supporters, Cooper slammed the OBBB and argued it would eliminate Medicaid coverage for more than 650,000 North Carolinians. “Cooper has kept open the political campaign apparatus that operated his runs for governor, even though he was term-limited in 2024.” (WRAL)

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

Mike Lawler opts for reelection bid

By James A. Downs

REDISTRICTING ROUNDUP: Texas Voters Against Redistricting, Per Poll

A Z to A Research poll conducted for the DCCC/HMP of likely Texas voters (July 16-20; 2,449 LVs; +/-2%) found that 63% of voters found the upcoming redistricting unnecessary, 41% of Republicans agreed. Additionally, “voters see Texas Republicans prioritizing a partisan power grab ahead of flood relief by a margin of 53% to 32%.” (release)

- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** It may not matter what voters think of the Republican efforts in Texas. So often representatives are determined by geography, and if Texas Republicans execute a successful gerrymander, the odds voters would punish lawmakers are low, especially if Democratic voters are drawn into deep-red seats.
- **NOT SO FAST.** Yet, Republicans are banking on Latino voters sticking with the GOP after they played a significant role in electing President Trump. State “mapmakers could draw a host of Hispanic-majority districts that Trump would have won in 2024.”
- **CAN I COUNT ON YOU?** The question remains outstanding whether the party can convert Latino voters into “reliable GOP voters.” Democrats believe many won’t turn out to vote or are turned off by the president’s policies so far. (*Punchbowl News*)
- **PIECE OF (CRAB)CAKE.** As Democrats figure out how to counter Texas, Maryland’s House Majority Leader David Moon (D) said he’s introducing legislation to reconfigure Maryland’s map “if any other state cheats & draws new maps outside of the census period.” (*The Hill*)

RACE FOR THE HOUSE: Epstein Files Gives House Democrats an Edge

Congressional Democrats have “finally found their mojo” by taking advantage of every crack the Jeffrey Epstein files has formed in the White House and among the GOP. The strategy has effectively derailed House Republicans' agenda, forcing Speaker Mike Johnson to bring the remaining session to a bumbling halt early.

- **OPPORTUNITY.** Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries has persistently said that the files are a “lose-lose” battle for the Republican Party, where they are grappling with lies about the scandal or trying to protect allies involved. Jeffries effectively urged House Democrats to back Republicans into a corner, by forcing them “to kill language that would instruct the DOJ to release the files.”
- **CONSEQUENCES.** The ploy could have major implications in the upcoming primaries and midterm elections: Republicans will now be on the defensive, dodging questions about Epstein votes coming up in September, and Democrats can further build on the narrative that “the president is more interested in protecting the rich and powerful than average Joes and children.” (*Politico*)

COLORADO 08: Evans Misrepresented Family Immigration Story

Rep. Gabe Evans (R), who has leaned into his family’s history of immigration, “has mischaracterized the story of how his Depression-era ancestors achieved the American dream, and misstated key dates and details in his grandfather’s biography.”

- **DEETS.** Documents show that Evans’ grandfather entered the country unlawfully in 1941 and later arrested for an “immigration violation” and “made the subject of deportation proceedings.”
- **IN THE PAST.** “In the weeks preceding publication of this story, Evans appeared to acknowledge or accept the assertion that his grandfather had entered the country unlawfully in at least two interviews.” Evans has said his grandfather immigrated legally on multiple occasions as well.
- **BIGGER PICTURE.** Evans ran a immigration-heavy campaign, focusing on stronger immigration policies similar to rhetoric championed by President Trump.

- **FOR EXAMPLE.** “You need to go stand in that line and do it the right way, do it the legal way, so you are not leapfrogging over those folks like my grandfather, who did it the right way and did it the legal way,” Evans said during the campaign.
- **THE RESPONSE.** A spokeswoman for Evans wrote the following in response: “In Hispanic culture, immigrating the ‘right way’ generally means working hard, contributing to their community, and not causing problems—not necessarily that something is 100% perfectly legal.” (*Colorado Newslines*)

GEORGIA 10: Republicans Make Moves

With Rep. Mike Collins (R) expected to announce a long-awaited bid for Senate, the field to replace him in Congress is already forming.

- **EYEING THE RACE.** There is one clear contender so far, state Rep. Houston Gaines (R), a close ally of Gov. Brian Kemp (R). State Sen. Brian Strickland (R) recently announced he will not be joining Gaines and will instead bid for attorney general. (*Atlanta-Journal Constitution*)

NEW YORK 17: Lawler Stays Put

Rep. Mike Lawler (R) announced he will seek reelection instead of running for governor. Lawler had been exploring a run for governor as he’d been seen as the most competitive candidate to take on Gov. Kathy Hochul (D).

- **NEED YOU HERE.** “But with Republicans preparing to defend a minuscule House majority, he was under intense pressure from” President Trump and “congressional allies to run for re-election. The president made his views clear in a private meeting at the White House last week.” (*New York Times*)
- **THE FIELD.** The Hudson Valley-area district has one of the most crowded Democratic fields across the battlefield. Rockland County Legislator Beth Davidson (D), Army veteran Cait Conley (D), and others are running.

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

Jack Ciattarelli selects James Gannon at running mate

By Abby Turner

STATE OF THE STATES: Democrats Wrestle with Medicaid Messaging

“Democratic governors and gubernatorial candidates are seizing on cuts to Medicaid in the recently passed GOP reconciliation bill, betting that health care can again serve as the political winner it did in the 2018 and 2022 midterms.”

- **NOT JUST YET.** But the bill’s “deepest cuts to Medicaid won’t hit until 2027 or beyond.” The lag poses problems for candidates, who have, for now, stuck to attacking Republicans for the bill instead of proposing “specific policies to mitigate the cuts if elected.”
- **THE OPTIONS AT HAND.** Governors are limited in their responses to the cuts, left with proposing tax hikes, “allocating money away from other state programs, or letting the cuts stand.”
- **A STICKY STRATEGY.** Strategists warn that Democrats’ messaging in upcoming cycles won’t “resonate with voters who haven’t yet felt the full impact of the cuts.” (*National Journal*)

ARIZONA: Karrin Taylor Robson Outraises Andy Biggs

2022 candidate Karrin Taylor Robson (R) “has edged out” Rep. Andy Biggs (R-05) “in campaign fundraising for their upcoming bid for the Republican nominee for governor in 2026.”

- **IN THE FILINGS.** Robson raised \$575,000 in Q2, loaned herself \$2.2 million, and had \$876,000 on hand. Biggs raised \$610,710 and had \$437,000 on hand.
- **NOT THE FIRST LOAN.** Robson loaned her 2022 campaign \$16.9 million “in her unsuccessful bid to be the GOP nominee,” losing to Senior Advisor to the United States Agency for Global Media Kari Lake (R).
- **FOR EXPENDITURES.** Robson spent \$2.2 million on advertising, while Biggs “spent only about \$180,000 in the past three months, with most of that amount going toward mailing services and consultants.”
- **TPA’S BIGG BACKING.** Turning Point Action “reported it has already spent nearly \$459,000 on behalf of Biggs. That includes \$352,00 for TV ads.” (*Arizona Capitol Times*)
- **HOBBS’ HAUL.** Gov. Katie Hobbs’ (D) campaign announced she raised \$1.3 million in Q2. Hobbs has yet to declare if she’ll seek reelection. (release)

MINNESOTA: Walz to Decide on Third Term in the Fall

Gov. Tim Walz (D) “is expected to announce his plans” to seek a third term “after the Minnesota State Fair wraps up in September” as he considers a run for president. (*Axios*)

NEW YORK: Mike Lawler Clears Path for Elise Stefanik’s Anticipated Gubernatorial Run

Rep. Mike Lawler’s (R-17) “much-anticipated decision to forgo the governor’s race will help clear a path for” Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-21), a “close ally of” President Trump “who is positioning herself for a statewide run.” Nassau County executive Bruce Blakeman (R) is also considering a run for governor. (*New York Times*)

- **QUICK TO COMMENT.** The DGA was quick to chime in on Lawler’s announcement, saying “Donald Trump has officially killed Mike Lawler’s dream of becoming governor of New York and given the GOP gubernatorial nomination to his top D.C. ally Elise Stefanik. Our condolences.” (release)
- **ALSO CHIMING IN.** Following Lawler’s announcement, Stefanik once again attacked Gov. Kathy Hochul (D) and said she will make a final decision after this year’s November elections. (X)

NEW JERSEY: Jack Ciattarelli Taps Morris County Sheriff As Running Mate

2021 nominee Jack Ciattarelli (R) tapped Morris County Sheriff James Gannon (R) “as the Republican nominee for lieutenant governor.”

- **NEW SHERIFF IN TOWN.** His pick “reinforces Ciattarelli’s law-and-order message with crossover appeal and adds a running mate with strong support in Morris County, where Republicans worry” Rep. Mikie Sherrill (D-11) “could gain ground.”
- **HAILING FROM NJ-11.** “Gannon, as sheriff, has maintained a cordial relationship with his congresswoman, who has occasionally praised him across party lines.” Gannon comes from Sherrill’s district. (*New Jersey Globe*)
- **MIKIE’S TURN.** Gov. Phil Murphy (D) “said he has not been consulted by the Democratic congresswoman’s campaign regarding their search for a lieutenant governor pick.” Sherrill has until Monday to nominate her running mate. (*New Jersey Globe*)

- **ON THE FUNDING SIDE.** “The New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC) announced this afternoon that Sherrill has received” \$2.1 million “in matching funds, putting her 17% of the way towards the overall \$12.5 million cap, while Ciattarelli has received” \$1.6 million, “13% of the cap.”
- **DOLING OUT CASH.** Gubernatorial candidates in the state can “receive \$2 for every \$1 they raise, but they face an overall expenditure limit of \$18.5 million for the general election campaign.” (*New Jersey Globe*)

VIRGINIA: RGA Hesitant to Invest More in Winsome Earle-Sears’ Campaign

“The convergence of paltry fundraising, weak polling and a candidate seen as incapable of fixing either has some in the RGA’s orbit unenthused ... about giving much more than the \$500,000 the group has already contributed to” Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears (R).

- **LESS THAN LAST TIME.** The group gave Gov. Glenn Youngkin (R) \$10.7 million directly in 2021. Youngkin has also opted to not contribute much personal money or contributions from his PAC to the ticket.
- **DON’T CALL.** “Making the problem worse, Sears is reluctant to make fundraising or even glaringly obvious political phone calls” as she has “not reached out to some of the most reliable donors in Virginia or to top GOP figures.”
- **TRUMP STAYS OUT.** President Trump “has yet to embrace her candidacy, a non-endorsement that stems from her criticism of him between his two terms.” (Jonathan Martin, *Politico*)

WISCONSIN: Tom Tiffany to Decide on Gubernatorial Run After July

Rep. Tom Tiffany (R-07) will decide whether to enter the Republican primary for governor after July after flirting with a bid on X. Former Navy SEAL Bill Berrien (R) and Washington County Executive Josh Schoemann (R) are both running while Gov. Tony Evers (D) still weighs a third term. (WMTV)

OVERLOOKED

Out for the Summer

By Amelia Monroe

With the House grinding to a halt over tensions created by the Epstein files and the Senate getting pressed by President Trump to forgo their break altogether to confirm nominees, the typical August recess may not be in play for the bulk of Congress. The most recognizable adaptation of the end-of-summer recess was introduced in the 1960s, when Sen. Gale McGee (D-WY) all but begged for his colleagues to adopt a summer break. The move came after a swelling of the federal government, with expanded legislative duties following the Great Depression. A combination of growing workloads and a need to meet expectations left the 1950s and 60s fraught with long, never-ending legislative sessions. Among the August recesses’ most ardent supporters were the wives of members of Congress, who pestered the idea that separation from family that comes as a result of longer sessions does more harm than good. After decades-long back-and-forth arguments over the premise of an August recess it was finally tried out in the 1990s.

