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SPOTLIGHT

Democrats Dance with Split-Ticket Ballots

The decline of crossover members weighs on the party.

By Amelia Monroe

The slow decline of split-ticket voting has hampered Democrats' successes in recent elections.

Much of the decrease can be attributed to a widening divide between state and national-level politicians since President Trump took office in 2016, with downballot candidates increasingly struggling to separate themselves from their national party.

J. Miles Coleman, the associate editor of *Sabato's Crystal Ball* at the UVA Center for Politics, said constituent work and heading a congressional committee has less of a sway on voters.

"The death of those kinds of committee assignments and local issues, to me, has increasingly taken a backseat to whether you have a D or R behind your name," Coleman told *Hotline*.

In a post-World War II era, Senate Democrats winning in a red state accounted for 70% of crossover members.

In 2022, Democrats held onto most of the toss-up Senate seats, which is impressive considering they had the presidency at that time, Coleman said. But, with President Trump back on the ballot in 2024, Democrats lost key Senate seats in Montana, Ohio, and West Virginia.

Outside those red states, Senate Democrats notched wins in swing states Trump carried, and in the upcoming midterm elections, Democrats will need to keep that streak alive if they have any hope of clawing back to power.

North Carolina and Georgia have two of the most competitive Senate races on the map going into 2026. With former North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper (D) jumping in today and Sen. Jon Ossoff (D-GA) seeking reelection, both races are key crossover seats that could decide the Senate majority.

During the 2020 election, Ossoff was able to flip Georgia's Senate seat by 1 point. The narrow margin makes Ossoff the top target for the Republicans.

Outside of these more volatile seats, Democrats' chances to expand the map depend on solidifying an identity outside of the national party—especially in seats that are not strictly Democratic, like Texas and Iowa, where they may have to find ways to appeal to a wider voter base rather than ride the ideological wave of the Democratic party.

“If you’re a Democrat running in Texas, you can’t take the standard Democratic position on every issue,” Coleman said.

— *Amelia Monroe*

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Quote of the Day

" All's fair in love and war. " — New York Gov. Kathy Hochul (D) on redrawing the Empire State's congressional map, New York Daily News, 7/27

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

JB Pritzker condemns Trump administration in keynote at North Carolina Democratic dinner

By Erika Filter

REPUBLICANS: MAGA Hopes Ghislaine Maxwell Solves Epstein Case

“Some of MAGA’s most prominent voices say without evidence that” convicted Epstein ally Ghislaine Maxwell “has inside knowledge that would help law enforcement bring untold elites to justice.” (*Washington Post*)

- **ALL WORK, NO REWARD.** House Speaker Mike Johnson said he would have “great pause” over a pardon for Maxwell. (NBC News)
- **THE SOCIAL NETWORK.** “The Trump administration has shifted its tone on social media to cater to its MAGA base.”
- **REVENGE TOUR.** “Many posts—several of which play off of trending memes—appear to showcase aggression toward some longtime political targets for” President Trump, such as immigrants and Democrats.” (NBC News)

WHITE HOUSE: Trump Ignores MAGA Cabinet Where it Counts

Just as President Trump “often ignored his conventional advisers in the first term, he’s stunned loyalists by sweeping aside” MAGA appointees in his Cabinet.

- **WHERE IT COUNTS.** “On the highest-profile issues, the ones that attract Trump’s own boundless energy and attention, the president has largely ignored his new staff.” (*Semafor*)

- **THE NUMBERS GAME.** “Trump is hardly the first politician to toss out figures that wilt under scrutiny. But he attaches precise numbers to his claims with unusual frequency, giving the assertions an air of authority and credibility—yet the numbers often end up being incorrect or not even plausible.” (*Washington Post*)

2028 WATCH: JB Pritzker Condemns Trump Administration at NC Dem Dinner

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker (D) “spoke like a presidential candidate in waiting in his keynote address at North Carolina Democrats’ Unity Dinner fundraiser.”

- **KEY NOTES.** In a 25-minute speech, Pritzker issued sharp condemnations of President Trump and his Cabinet “and outlined his vision for how Democrats can regain voters’ trust on kitchen table issues.”
- **PRITZKER SAYS:** “There’s a way out of this mess—I know, because I’ve been to this movie before when I was elected governor in 2018 to replace a very destructive Republican chief executive.” (*NC Newsline*)
- **REPUBLICANS REST BEFORE MIDTERMS.** As Vice President JD Vance hesitates to comment publicly on a 2028 bid, he reportedly “will not make significant political moves of his own until after the midterms.”
- **CONSENSUS CANDIDATE.** Secretary of State Marco Rubio dropped Vance’s name when asked in an interview if he had 2028 ambitions. (*Politico*)
- **THE AGENDA FOR NOW.** Vance will visit a steel plant in Canton, Ohio, “as part of his effort to promote the megabill that the White House pushed through Congress this month.” (NBC News)

SUNDAY SCARIES: Epstein Case Pervades

Rep. Thomas Massie (R-KY 04) called on the House to vote to release files related to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

- **MEET THE PRESS:** Massie said “the release of the Epstein files is emblematic of what” President Trump “ran for and why he got the populist vote.”
- **MASSIE SAYS:** “I don’t know why it should be politically painful to be transparent. Is the pain he’s talking about that somebody in our party will be embarrassed by those files? Then that’s not a good excuse.”
- **INFORMATION CAMPAIGN.** House Speaker Mike Johnson said, “House Republicans insist upon the release of all credible evidence and information related to Epstein in any way. But we are also insisting upon the protection of innocent victims.”
- **ONE LITTLE PROBLEM.** Johnson said Massie’s proposed bill that would force the House to vote on releasing the Epstein files does not adequately protect the victims.
- **THE MAXWELL FACTOR.** Johnson said convicted Epstein ally Ghislaine Maxwell “should have a life sentence at least,” not her current 20-year sentence.
- **STATE OF THE UNION:** Sen. Mark Kelly (D-AZ) would not give a yes-or-no answer to whether he would run for president in 2028.

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

Roy Cooper launches North Carolina Senate bid

By Nicholas Anastácio

GEORGIA: Mike Collins Enters Race Against Brian Kemp's Wishes

Rep. Mike Collins (R-10) launched his long-awaited challenge against Sen. Jon Ossoff (D), promising to “steamroll the radical left” and deliver on President Trump’s agenda. In his launch video, Collins highlighted his sponsorship of the Laken Riley Act while drawing on his truck driving roots.

- **CROWDED STADIUM.** Collins joins Rep. Buddy Carter (R-01) in the Republican primary, and former Tennessee football Coach Derek Dooley (R) is expected to enter soon. (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*)
- **RIFT INCOMING.** As Gov. Brian Kemp (R) privately backs Dooley in the GOP primary, “top lieutenants in Trump’s political orbit believe Kemp is going rogue.” Several sources close to the president’s political operation told *NOTUS* that Kemp’s fervent support for Dooley could spur Trump to deny the football coach an endorsement.
- **HOLD YOUR HORSES.** Kemp, the White House, the NRSC, and the GOP-aligned SLF planned to coordinate on the right candidate to unseat Ossoff. While Dooley met with the White House, the NRSC, and SLF, “the message to Kemp was that he shouldn’t get involved without everyone signing off.” (*NOTUS*)

LOUISIANA: Eric Skrmetta Becomes Latest Cassidy Challenger

Public Service Commissioner Eric Skrmetta (R) entered the crowded GOP primary against Sen. Bill Cassidy (R). Skrmetta sits on the state GOP’s central committee and chaired the Louisiana delegation at the 2024 Republican National Convention. Skrmetta said in a statement that his state “needs a U.S. senator who will support a strong conservative agenda.”

- **CHALLENGERS GALORE.** He joins state Treasurer John Fleming (R), state Sen. Blake Miguez (R), and health care administrator Sammy Wyatt (R) in challenging the senator. Rep. Julia Letlow (R-05) “is widely rumored to be considering getting in the race.” (*Times-Picayune/New Orleans Advocate*)
- **WHERE’S THE NUMBERS?** A JMC Analytics and Polling survey conducted for Fleming (July 19-21; 625 LVs; +/-3.9%) found him “running second” to Cassidy in a hypothetical GOP primary field that includes Letlow, Miguez, and Wyatt. Cassidy got 24%, but the polling memo did not include the rest of the candidates’ percentages.
- **A THIRD UNSURE.** In a hypothetical Cassidy-Fleming primary runoff, Fleming led the senator, 36%-29%, with 35% undecided. (release)
- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** Cassidy is likely to qualify for a runoff in a crowded primary, but Fleming’s internal poll doesn’t give much to infer. What is for certain is that it’s not guaranteed who Cassidy would face in a runoff and whether the senator would win the runoff outright.

NORTH CAROLINA: Roy Cooper Launches Senate Run to Dems’ Delight

Former Gov. Roy Cooper (D) launched his campaign to replace retiring Sen. Thom Tillis (R), landing Democrats their top recruit in *Hotline*’s most likely Senate seat to flip.

- **D.C. DETOUR.** In his launch video, Cooper said he “never really wanted to go to Washington,” but decided to enter the race as “politicians in D.C. are running up our debt, ripping away our healthcare, ... and even putting Medicare and Social Security at risk.”

- **BLUE CARPET.** Elected statewide on multiple occasions, Cooper is expected to have a glidepath toward the Democratic nomination. (WTVD)
- **DEMS' RECRUIT.** Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and DSCC Chair Kirsten Gillibrand both backed Cooper's candidacy, adding in a joint statement that he "is a formidable candidate who will flip North Carolina's Senate seat." (release)
- **NICKEL OUT THE WELL.** Former Rep. Wiley Nickel (D) is expected to suspend his campaign and endorse Cooper. Nickel is likely to pursue the open race for Wake County district attorney. (WRAL)
- **GOP ONSLAUGHT.** The GOP-aligned SLF is launching a \$200,000 digital ad buy against Cooper, labeling him "Radical Roy" and questioning his moderate leanings. One ad ties Cooper to former Vice President Kamala Harris, arguing he "sides with they/them." (*Punchbowl News*)
- **REPUBLICANS' PICK.** Majority Leader John Thune is planning a fall visit to the Tar Heel State to fundraise for RNC Chairman Michael Whatley's Senate bid. (*Axios*)

NEW HAMPSHIRE: Scott Brown Backtracks DEI Support

Former Sen. Scott Brown (R-MA), as dean and president at New England Law Boston in 2021, touted diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts as a "core value" and a "top priority" of the school. Now, he assails DEI as "woke" as he runs to replace retiring Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D).

- **THAT WAS THEN.** In a three-minute video, Brown touted the school's DEI programs for Black History Month, "including 'implicit bias training' for faculty, foreshadowing plans for 'combating systemic racism,' praising a DEI task force as a 'top priority,' and promoting college-backed DEI initiatives. Under Brown's leadership over the next two months, the school launched a diversity career-readiness program and celebrated Trans Day of Visibility."
- **THIS IS NOW.** Brown complimented President Trump's rollback of former President Biden's DEI efforts in the federal government and said he left the school in order to "address these issues in a public and direct manner." Brown also contrasted himself from Rep. Chris Pappas (D-01), who's also running for the seat, on the issue of transgender athletes in women's sports.
- **PRIMARY CONCERN.** Brown faces state Sen. Dan Innis (R) in the Republican primary. Trump's political operation is also looking to land a recruit to run for the seat. (*Washington Examiner*)

SOUTH CAROLINA: Project 2025 Architect Launches Graham Primary Challenge

Project 2025 architect Paul Dans (R) launched a primary challenge against Sen. Lindsey Graham (R), saying "it's time to show him the door." Dans cheered President Trump's cuts to the federal workforce and federal program funding, but said there's "more work to do."

- **TRUMP ALUM.** Dans "worked in the first Trump administration as White House liaison to the office of personnel management," before joining the Heritage Foundation to organize Project 2025. He "expects to have support from Project 2025 allies, as well as the ranks of Trump's supporters in the state."
- **GRAHAM'S HATERS.** He is set to formally launch his campaign at an event Wednesday in Charleston. He joins Graham, former Lt. Gov. André Bauer (R), and businessman Mark Lynch (R) in a crowded GOP primary. Trump endorsed Graham for reelection earlier this year. (AP)

TEXAS: Ronny Jackson Meets with White House Amid Senate Speculation

Rep. Ronny Jackson (R-13) met with White House officials in "recent days" to discuss his state's politics and the showdown between Sen. John Cornyn (R) and state Attorney General Ken Paxton (R).

- **ON THE AGENDA.** Jackson “discussed what he’s hearing” about the race as he considers whether to jump into the Republican primary. “It’s not clear if Jackson’s potential entry into the race was discussed at the meeting.”
- **HOUSE HUDDLE.** Jackson and Rep. Wesley Hunt (R-38) are both considering Senate runs as Cornyn struggles against Paxton in primary polls and Republicans are concerned about Paxton’s chances in a general election. (*Semafor*)

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

Kathy Hochul teases redistricting fight

By James A. Downs and Amelia Monroe

RACE FOR THE HOUSE: Democratic Groups Invest Money Around Texas Redistricting

Liberal outside group Unrig Our Economy announced a \$2 million ad campaign against four Texas Republicans whose seats may become more competitive with redistricting. The campaign targets Reps. Dan Crenshaw (R-02), Lance Gooden (R-05), Monica De La Cruz (R-15), and Beth Van Duyne (R-24). The ads focus on the GOP reconciliation bill and Medicaid cuts. (*Punchbowl News*)

- **DEMS FIGHT BACK.** The Democratic-aligned House Majority PAC announced the creation of its “Lone Star Fund,” a program “designed to flip Republican-held seats in gerrymandered districts and hold the GOP accountable.” HMP hopes to raise up to \$20 million as part of the plan to use toward candidate recruitment, ads, social media content creation, and voter registration and mobilization.
- **KEY POINT.** Among other provisions listed in the memo, HMP will fund “early and frequent communication with Hispanic voters to turn the tide on recent Republican gains.” (release)

REDISTRICTING ROUNDUP: Kathy Hochul May Fight Fire With Fire

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul (D) said last week that she’ll consider a mid-cycle redraw if “there’s other states violating the rules and are trying to give themselves an advantage.” The governor said she will talk to Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries about a potential plan, though the Empire State faces a more complicated path than states like Texas.

- **NOT SO FAST.** “New York’s constitution only allows for redistricting to take place once a decade and it’s unclear how or if Democrats could get around that provision. The liberal-led state’s highest court would have to weigh in on any effort to redraw the districts.”
- **BUT IF.** A New York remap would threaten Rep. Nicole Malliotakis (R-15) on Staten Island and Rep. Nick LaLota (R-01) on Long Island. Democrats could also try to crack Rep. Mike Lawler (R-17) and Claudia Tenney (R-24). (*New York Daily News*)
- **TX.** State legislators heard public testimony in Houston on Saturday as part of the mid-cycle redistricting process underway in the Lone Star State. Republicans have yet to reveal any proposed maps. “That they have yet to do so was a major point of contention at Saturday’s hearings, where many witnesses questioned why the committee was taking testimony when no one could say what boundaries were being proposed.” Several candidates for Houston-based TX-18 testified about the potential breakup of the minority-majority seat. Rep. Sylvester Turner (D) died in March, leaving the seat open. (Houston Public Media)

- **MORE ON TX.** Texas Republicans are banking that the party maintains its growth with Hispanic voters as it pursues its redraw of the map. Federally elected Republicans have justified those shifts as reason to reconfigure the lines. Rep. Vicente Gonzalez (D-34), whose seat may change, “said the Republican redistricting plan will backfire.” He does not think Hispanic voters have flocked to the GOP and instead believe they were angered over the Biden administration’s handling of the southern border. (Spectrum News)
- **FROM THE TOP BRASS.** The DNC announced a new initiative to reach “persuadable Republican Texas voters” about the redistricting process in Texas. The campaign will enlist 30,000 volunteers across the state. (*Politico*)

PRIMARY ROUNDUP: Summer Lee Again Faces Scrutiny

Rep. Mike Collins (R-GA 10) announced a run for Senate on Monday, leaving open a deeply conservative district in east Georgia. State Rep. Houston Gaines (R) is a “prominent likely contender.” He has \$900,000 in his state campaign account. (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*)

- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** Gaines would not be able to transfer that money to a federal campaign account, but he could potentially use it to bankroll a PAC backing his candidacy. That would give Gaines a tremendous early advantage over other contenders.
- **MO-5.** Progressive radio host Hartzell Gray (D) announced his run in the Democratic primary against Rep. Emmanuel Cleaver (D). Gray is opting for a grassroots campaign to “challenge the political status quo and bring new leadership to a district ready for more than speeches and sermons.” Progressive Democrats of America endorsed Gray. (release)
- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** As Republicans look for opportunities to flip seats via redistricting, the White House has floated Missouri as a potential option. The Kansas City seat is not Voting Rights Act protected, meaning Republicans could easily dismantle it, if Gov. Mike Kehoe (R) calls a special session. If that were to be the case, the Democratic nominee—Cleaver or otherwise—may not matter.
- **PA-12.** A recent poll seems to be testing Rep. Summer Lee’s (D) strength going into 2026. The “shadowy poll” includes two primary challengers: former state Auditor Eugene DePasquale (D) and Pittsburgh City Controller Rachel Heisler (D). DePasquale immediately ruled out a bid for Lee’s seat following the poll. Left-leaning outlet *The Intercept* ruled that AIPAC, “a pro-Israel group that has actively sought to defeat progressives it views as hostile towards Israel,” were the sponsors.
- **HISTORY.** This isn’t the first instance Lee has been one of AIPAC’s primary targets: its affiliate, United Democracy Project, spent millions trying to dismantle Lee’s first campaign in 2022 and while there were signs it would take a jab at her in 2024, the group opted for the sidelines. (WESA)

NEW YORK: No Clear Path to Victory Amid Trump’s Spending Bill

The passage of President Trump’s massive-tax and-spend bill provides both sides of the aisle with ready ammunition that can be used as a launching point for their campaigns going into the midterms.

- **BATTLE PLANS.** For Reps. Andrew Garbarino (R-02) and Nick LaLota (R-01) the massive spending bill gives them leeway to tout tax breaks, including ones that enhance the state and local tax deduction cap. As for Democratic Reps. Tom Suozzi (03) and Laura Gillen (04), they have the opportunity to ridicule a projected increase in uninsured New Yorkers stemming from cuts to Medicaid and the loss of Affordable Care Act tax subsidies.
- **UNCERTAIN OUTCOMES.** This strategy doesn’t have a clear, one-way path to victory. The Long Island districts will prove to be a battleground regardless, “where Trump carried both Nassau and Suffolk counties but Suozzi and Gillen won seats previously flipped by Republicans in 2022.” Both the NRCC and DCCC are readily investing into the competitive seats: the NRCC listed NY-03 and NY-04 as two of 26 House Democrats they plan to target during the midterms and the DCCC vowed to make it known how vulnerable the Republicans are. (*Newsday*)

PENNSYLVANIA: Democrats Fight for the Commonwealth

Political ads have already begun airing in competitive House districts across the state as Pennsylvania could be make or break for the House majority. Moreover, Democrats are bullish about their chances in three to four districts thanks in part to popular Gov. Josh Shapiro's (D) reelection campaign in 2026. A source close to the governor said he plans to be involved in the House races; he already endorsed 2024 PA-10 nominee Janelle Stelson (D).

- **PA-07.** Pennsylvania Professional Fire Fighters Association President Bob Brooks (D) is mulling a run against Rep. Ryan Mackenzie (R).
- **OTHER SEATS.** In addition to PA-07 and PA-10, Democrats hope to pick off Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-01) and Rob Brensahan (R-08). "Fitzpatrick, perhaps the safest of the four, was one of two House Republicans to vote against" the GOP budget bill, which is likely to be the central issue in these races. Mackenzie said "swing voters have been more open-minded to the new work requirements for Medicaid included in the law." (*Washington Post*)

TENNESSEE 07 SPECIAL: Another Legislator Gets In

State Rep. Gino Bulso (R) joined the crowded field to replace former Rep. Mark Green (R), who resigned earlier this month. Bulso is the third Republican state legislator to enter the fray: State Reps. Jody Barrett (R) and Lee Reeves (R) are running.

- **ON THE OTHER SIDE.** Three Democratic legislators are also running, and a handful of other Republicans, such as former General Services Commissioner Matt Van Epps (R) and Montgomery County Commissioner Jason Knight (R), previously announced bids as well. (*Nashville Scene*)
- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** The sheer number of state legislators—six—in the special election presents a case study of how candidates will differentiate themselves in a crowded field. The three Republican legislators, part of a state supermajority, may be able to point to bills passed as part of their resume. The three Democratic contenders—effectively locked out of governance—are likely to frame the race as a national referendum on the Trump administration. As special primary and general elections typically produce low turnout, style—and maybe cash—could prove the deciding factor in a uniform field, which could be fruitful for non-legislative candidates.

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

Two Democrats split from National Governors Association amid Trump's pushback on states

By Abby Turner

STATE OF THE STATES: Dems Split Over Bipartisan NGA During Trump's Second Term

"Two prominent Democrats are stepping away from" the National Governors Association, "citing a lack of pushback to Trump administration policies and to some recent threats to state funding and operations."

- **WHO IS OUT.** Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly (D) will leave the organization at the end of the month, and Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz (D) "will stop paying dues to the organization next year as he is 'reassessing' his membership." (ABC News)

- **DEMS SPLIT OVER NGA ROLE.** As Kelly and Walz bow out of the NGA, Democratic governors are “weighing when to fight back against the administration, as the base is pushing for, and when to work with it to benefit their constituents” during President Trump’s second term.
- **VOWING TO STAY IN.** “Several Democratic governors who attended the weekend meeting expressed sympathy for Walz’s and Kelly’s decision. They also highlighted the importance of finding common ground with their political adversaries, suggesting that it remained a better option to try to win influence with them instead of not showing up.” (NBC News)
- **ON DECK.** The group elected Gov. Kevin Stitt (R-OK) as its chair and Gov. Wes Moore (D-MD) vice chair. Moore “will assume the role of chair for the 2026-2027 term.” (*Baltimore Sun*)

FLORIDA: DeSantis Rethinks Jay Collins for Lieutenant Governor Appointment

Gov. Ron DeSantis’ (R) “thinking has changed” over appointing state Sen. Jay Collins (R) as lieutenant governor. “Though Collins is still in the mix, DeSantis has been put off in part by what he sees as Collins treating an appointment as a foregone conclusion.”

- **WHAT TO DO.** DeSantis, who has indicated he will make a decision soon, could “stay the course and pick a successor he’ll endorse for governor,” pick a lieutenant governor “who’d have more of a caretaker role” and stay out of the race, or make a later decision on who to endorse for governor. (*Politico*)

IOWA: State GOP Continues Warning Over Rob Sand’s Candidacy

“Top Iowa Republicans warned supporters that failing to defeat” state Auditor Rob Sand (D) “in the governor's race would ‘unravel’ key GOP legislative achievements.” Sand, the state’s highest-ranking elected Democrat, has taken to social media to “post about bow-hunting or other activities that broaden his appeal. But” Iowa GOP Chair Jeff Kaufmann “insisted Republican voters shouldn't be fooled by Sand's social media persona.”

- **GETTING DICEY.** “Republicans' comments attacking Sand underscore the competitive nature of Iowa's governor's race in 2026 after incumbent” Gov. Kim Reynolds (R) “opted not to seek another term.” (*Des Moines Register*)

MICHIGAN: John James Raises Over \$2M Since April

Rep. John James’ (R-10) campaign announced raising \$2.3 million in the last three months and had \$1.9 million on hand. The campaign “and its allies” have raised over \$7.25 million since his campaign launched in April. The billionaire DeVos family of Michigan donated \$5 million to a PAC backing James in April. (release)

NEVADA: Aaron Ford Officially Launches Challenge to Lombardo

State Attorney General Aaron Ford (D) formally announced his challenge to Gov. Joe Lombardo (R) after he “previously confirmed his intent to run in December.” Ford, who will face Washoe County Commission Chairwoman Alexis Hill (D), already picked up the endorsements of both Nevada senators. (KTNV)

OHIO: Vivek Ramaswamy Rides Wave of Political Outsiders’ Success

2024 presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy (R) is the latest in a string of political “outsiders with no prior elected experience have tapped into Ohio voters' frustrations with the political establishment.”

- **DOING IT BETTER.** “Ramaswamy has, at least so far, done what” Vice President JD Vance and Sen. Bernie Moreno (R) could not: clearing the Republican primary field.
- **WHY IT WORKS.** “Ramaswamy’s pitch as the Republican change candidate is effective, in part, because he couldn’t be much more different than the man he wants to replace,” Gov. Mike DeWine (R). (*Cincinnati Enquirer*)

PENNSYLVANIA: Doug Mastriano Close to Entering GOP Primary

Following a series of social media posts hinting about another run for governor, 2022 nominee Doug Mastriano (R) said “that he is close to entering the 2026 race for governor” and won’t be discouraged by an early GOP endorsement, which will likely go to state Treasurer Stacy Garrity (R). (*Philadelphia Inquirer*)

- **THE COST OF MASTRIANO.** However, President Trump’s “advisers privately fear the far-right firebrand could cost Republicans the elusive Pennsylvania governor’s seat and ... drag down the GOP ticket in the midterms next year.” Some Pennsylvania “GOP operatives said they hope Trump will back Garrity in a bid to block Mastriano,” but “expressed pessimism that anyone can defeat” Gov. Josh Shapiro (D). (*Politico*)

SOUTH CAROLINA: Nancy Mace to Soon Decide on Gubernatorial Bid

Rep. Nancy Mace (R-01) said yesterday “she plans to decide in the coming days whether to launch a bid for South Carolina governor.” Despite a crowded Republican primary field, Mace said, if she enters, it will be “a two-man race” between her and state Attorney General Alan Wilson (R). (*The Hill*)

- **JUST ANNOUNCED.** Rep. Ralph Norman (R-05) officially launched his campaign for governor yesterday. His “campaign team said he has been endorsed by” 2024 presidential candidate Nikki Haley (R), former governor of the state. (WYFF)

WISCONSIN: Scott Walker Declines Another Gubernatorial Run After Cryptic Posts

After “a series of cryptic posts on social media teasing a potential run for governor,” former Gov. Scott Walker (R) announced he will not run to replace retiring Gov. Tony Evers (D). Former Navy SEAL Bill Berrien (R) and Washington County Executive Josh Schoemann (R) are already running in the Republican primary. (WISN)

OVERLOOKED

It’s a Bird, It’s a Plane, Oh No, It’s a Smear Campaign

By Amelia Monroe

A daily onslaught of targeted political ads nitpicking every negative detail of an opponent's campaign has become an expected landmark of an election cycle. This kind of below the belt TV ads date back to 1964, when President Lyndon B. Johnson's controversial "Daisy" ad put his opponent in the hot seat, by suggesting a vote for him would lead to an all-out nuclear demolition. Where the ads of today differ from those more than half a decade ago is the death of network neutrality. In the 1960s and onward candidates weren't given the luxury of a national network—like Fox News—persistently uplifting their political advertisements. For example, in 2020, one of President Trump's many infamous commercials included audio from Fox News host Sean Hannity, which alleged former President Biden supported defunding the police.