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News From The States

EVENING WRAP



By [Sean Scully](#)

Hello, and welcome to Friday. It also happens to be the annual Democracy Day, on which we ponder the fate of our republic.

The Big Takeaway

State-level policy and politics are what States Newsroom was created to cover and that's mostly what we write about every day. That means the notion of democracy is pretty important to us, to the point where we have a reporter dedicated solely to covering issues of voting and democracy.

That's also why States Newsroom is proud to be one of 135 news organizations participating in a collaborative journalism project for Democracy Day, created last year by the Center for Cooperative Media, at Montclair State University in New Jersey, and the Institute for Nonprofit News, [our D.C. bureau reports](#).

Why is this important? Because democracy is under serious threat. If the [Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol](#) isn't evidence enough, look at the efforts [to question and undermine the 2020 election](#), and [the voting system itself](#). Look at the efforts by state legislatures [to limit who can vote](#) and [how voters can express their will](#) in the form of ballot initiatives. Look at the flagrant efforts in many states [to rig elections by drawing districts](#) to disadvantage opposition parties or disfavored communities.

More than 80% of Americans [surveyed in a recent poll](#) said they were at least a little bit worried about the fate of American democracy. Half of those said they were "very worried," and the unease cut across all party lines.

That's what Democracy Day is about: telling you the story of our democracy, making readers aware how the process is supposed to work and who is trying to pervert it — or save it.

“It doesn't have to be negative and only focus on the threats,” Beatrice Forman, a reporter with the Philadelphia Inquirer and Democracy Day's project coordinator, told our D.C. bureau. “Pro-democracy journalism can also focus on solutions to those threats: Who are the people on the ground doing things to enfranchise people and to make people feel comfortable exercising their civic rights?”

Let's have a look at what some of our state outlets are saying about democracy today.



Democracy Day. 'Cause this stuff is important

(Courtesy Democracy Day 2023)

Despite a stereotype that young voters are disinterested in politics, they flexed their muscle in Kansas in August of last year when about 130,000 Kansans younger than 30 turned out to vote on a constitutional amendment that could have led to a ban on abortion in the state, [the Kansas Reflector reports](#).

But then, three months later, only 100,000 under-30 voters showed up for the midterm elections. Only 72,000 young people voted in both elections.

“Perhaps some youth, especially those for whom abortion was a major motivating issue, felt like they had already made their voices heard and taken action on it in August, and didn't feel the same need to do so again in November,” said Alberto Medina, communications team lead for the [Center](#)

[for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement](#) at Tufts University. “That may point to a lack of information and outreach from candidates and campaigns about other issues at play in the election and the impact that their vote could have on some of those other major concerns.”

Advocates and researchers say that candidates and political parties routinely ignore younger voters, which leads to a sense of alienation or disengagement. Politicians also often put up barriers to keep younger voters (among others) out of the process.

Only 70 of the 105 Kansas counties, for example, offer the full 20-day early voting period allowed by state law, and only a handful have voting locations open on weekends or outside of business hours. A recent report by the American Civil Liberties Union of Kansas estimated that expanding early voting could boost turnout in elections by 20,000 votes.

"If there's only one early voting day or it's at a really inconvenient time or on the weekend, what kind of message is that sending to young voters about whether the officials and institutions actually want their participation?" Medina said.



Democrat Mary Peltola, right, managed to outrank Republican Sarah Palin, not right, twice under Alaska's ranked choice voting system. And Republicans don't like it one little bit.

(Yereth Rosen/Alaska Beacon)

Even as cities and states in the lower 48 look to Alaska as a model for ranked choice voting, Alaska voters seem to be turning against the system, [the Alaska Beacon reports](#).

Under ranked choice voting, people cast ballots for multiple candidates, ranking them in order of preference. If nobody wins an outright majority of the top position votes, election officials whittle down to the winner by adding up the lower preference votes.

Alaska voters approved the system in 2020, allowing up to four votes in an open primary. Its first test came in 2022, when Alaska elected Mary Peltola as its first Democrat to the U.S. House and returned Republican Lisa Murkowski to the Senate, even though she has fallen out of favor with many Republicans for her moderate politics and criticism of former President Donald Trump.

In a traditional partisan election, the results might have been very different, analysts said.

“Alaska is looked at as a model,” said Tiffany Montemayor, a former Alaska Division of Elections official who helped carry out the system during the 2022 election. Montemayor now lives in Texas and just started a job with the [national Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center](#).

But national Republicans pushed back furiously, particularly since Trump-aligned candidates, including former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, had been squeezed out in favor of candidates seen as more moderate.

Trump called the ranked choice election “totally rigged.” Sen. Tom Cotton of Arkansas called it a “scam.” Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas said “I gotta say it sucks for Sarah Palin. Sarah Palin is a friend of mine. And it sucks even worse for the people of Alaska.”

A number of states, including Idaho, have moved to ban ranked choice voting, though there is an effort in Idaho to implement it via a ballot measure next year.

That kind of partisan pushback seems to be having an effect in Alaska. Recent polling shows about 54% of Alaska voters would support a ballot measure to repeal the system, despite the fact that it favored some of the most popular politicians in the state.

Montemayor said if that result holds in next year’s election, it would be a setback for the movement nationally because it might lead people to conclude, falsely, that the system somehow didn’t work in Alaska.

“I think there’s a side that’s vocal about it,” she said. “Just because people don’t like it or didn’t like it doesn’t mean that it didn’t work.”



All these stickers could be yours if you'd only vote.

(Getty Images)

In Alabama, voting rights groups are watching a troubling trend. Even while record numbers of people are registering to vote, the actual turnout in recent elections has been falling.

Registration is up 32% over the last decade, but in 2020, just 62% bothered to vote, the lowest turnout for a presidential election in the state in 30 years, [the Alabama Reflector reports](#). In the 2022 midterms, a dismal 37.2% of voters cast ballots.

“One of the things that we have seen, we are still seeing, is low turnout,” said Kathy Jones, president of the League of Women Voters of Alabama. “Presidential elections get high turnout, but in the elections at the local level, and during the midterms, you see pretty sad turnout. That is not good for democracy.”

Voting rights advocates say the problems are many, including Republican one-party dominance, gerrymandering, laws restricting when and how people can vote, and the state’s woeful tradition of disenfranchising Black voters.

“When there is a system that is the status quo, those who benefit from it want to rationalize that system, as being just,” said Richard Fording, a professor of political science at the University of

Alabama. “And if they have the power to do that through various channels of socialization like the education system, then that is likely to become embedded somewhat permanently in the culture.”

Put more simply: “We have started out way behind,” Fording said. “And so, it is just harder to finish first when starting last.”

More from the Democracy Day file: [Across Kentucky, election workers needed ahead of general election](#) ... [Ohio Sec. of State LaRose’s office move amid U.S. Senate candidacy raises ethical questions](#) ... [As violent political rhetoric escalates, Colorado election workers keep democracy going](#) ... [\(South Dakota\) ‘Future’ of voting unrealized: Few counties adopt vote centers and e-poll books](#) ... [Michigan has made big strides on voting rights. Here’s what to expect next](#) ... [Embracing election denial, Wisconsin Senate Republicans vote to fire chief election official](#) ... [Could New Mexico ban Trump from the ballot?](#) ... [Nebraska executive branch who’s who: state departments and governor’s cabinet](#) ... [Oklahoma lawmakers double poll worker pay to help address shortages](#) ... [\(North Carolina\) How much influence should college students have over local elections?](#) ... [Balance of power at stake as judge sets pre-Thanksgiving timeline for Georgia redistricting ruling](#) ... [‘Where’s Celia?’: Arizona elections official becomes the target of a GOP virtual manhunt](#)

Also Trending

The Arizona Republican Party has had a pretty rough go of it lately. Once fairly dominant, the GOP failed to deliver the key swing state for Donald Trump in 2020, then fumbled away all but one statewide office in 2022 by putting up election-denying and conspiracy-theorizing candidates who went over poorly with independent and Democratic voters. Several of those election deniers, including former gubernatorial candidate Kari Lake, continue to challenge the results in court (without the faintest whiff of success). And the GOP majority in the legislature hangs by a single vote in both chambers.

The party’s slumping fortunes have been mirrored in the party’s slumping fundraising lately, the Arizona Mirror reports.

OK, honestly, to call the fundraising “slumping” would be too polite. “Crashing” is more like it.

In January, the party reported more than \$150,000 on hand in its most important account, which pays for most of its operations, after taking in more than \$65,000 in contributions. By August, that had dropped to \$14,813.45. That’s at the same time the party spent \$57,370.94, but received just \$18,321.44 in donations. Not a single donor gave more than \$500 in August. They’re making ends meet by racking up debt and tapping secondary accounts.

“If this keeps up, it’s inevitable they’ll go broke,” said Chris Baker, a Scottsdale-based political consultant whose clients include Republican U.S. Rep. David Schweikert.

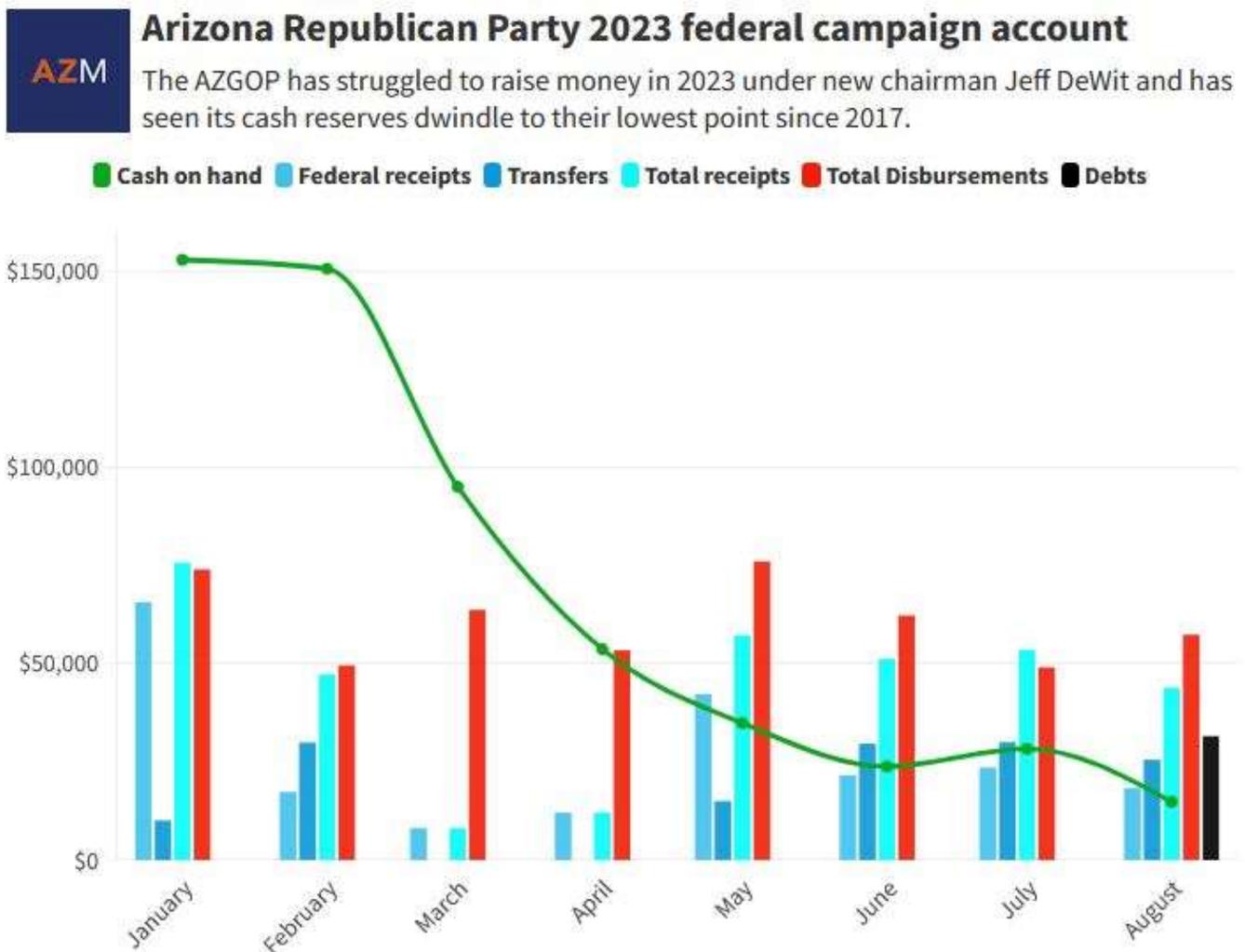
A party spokesperson didn't respond to a request for comment, but party Chair Jeff DeWit, who took office in January, appears to be struggling to live up to his promise when he was running for the position.

DeWit is a former campaign staffer for Trump and said he oversaw "over \$1 billion in campaign fundraising" for the operation.

"I want to bring this expertise to Arizona to give us a fundraising, ground game, candidate recruitment, media training, and organizational leadership advantage over the Democrats," [he wrote in one campaign pitch](#).

Baker had some advice for the new party chairman.

"If I was Jeff DeWit, my only priority going forward would be to engage in donor outreach and make the case — publicly and privately — that this is a new regime, and we're going to be laser-focused on electing Republicans," he said.



Source: Federal Election Commission • Jeff DeWit became chairman of the AZGOP in late January

Yep, that's a heck of a slump you got going there.

(Arizona Mirror graphic)

From the Everything Else Going On Today file: [\(New Hampshire\) energy officials slam ISO New England's proposed budget ... \(Indiana\) Crouch doubles down on tax cut proposal in first campaign ad ... California changes course, will not restrict state-funded travel to Nebraska ... Maryland public schools superintendent chooses not to return ... Consumers face higher car prices, lower inventory with auto workers on strike ... Rhode Island's Independent Man is coming down for restoration ... While serving time for child porn, Iowa EMT loses his license to practice](#)



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One Last Thing

For almost a decade now, Arby's has proclaimed "[We have the meats,](#)" a slogan pounded into our heads relentlessly by a TV ad campaign voiced, like a cheerful Darth Vader, by Ving Rhames.

But now a frustrated customer says all that is a big, fat, meaty lie. Joseph Alongis filed a class-action lawsuit in federal court in New York this month on behalf of anyone who has purchased any of several types of Arby's sandwiches since Sept. 5, 2020.

["The filing](#) alleges that Arby's sandwiches contain about half the meat advertised in its marketing materials, and that the brand intentionally portrays the sandwiches as being larger than they are," [food blog The Takeout reports](#). "The plaintiff alleges he ordered the Double Beef 'N Cheddar sandwich and the Smokehouse Brisket sandwich after seeing an image of the items on an Arby's menu board and expected the sandwiches to have the same amount of meat as what was depicted there."

No word yet on Arby's response.



Ah, but do you really?

(Photo by Rick Diamond/Getty Images for Arby's)

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