

# News From The States

# EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

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We've got one final walk in the political wilderness en route to the weekend, because the only way out is through.



## The Big Takeaway

Sometimes, that journey comes with a roadmap — or a neon flashing sign warning you of the danger ahead. On Thursday, that alert came from former members of Congress, who warned about the increasing potential for political violence ahead of the 2024 election, [our D.C. bureau reported](#).



*DANGER DANGER*  
(Photo by Scott Eisen/Getty Images)

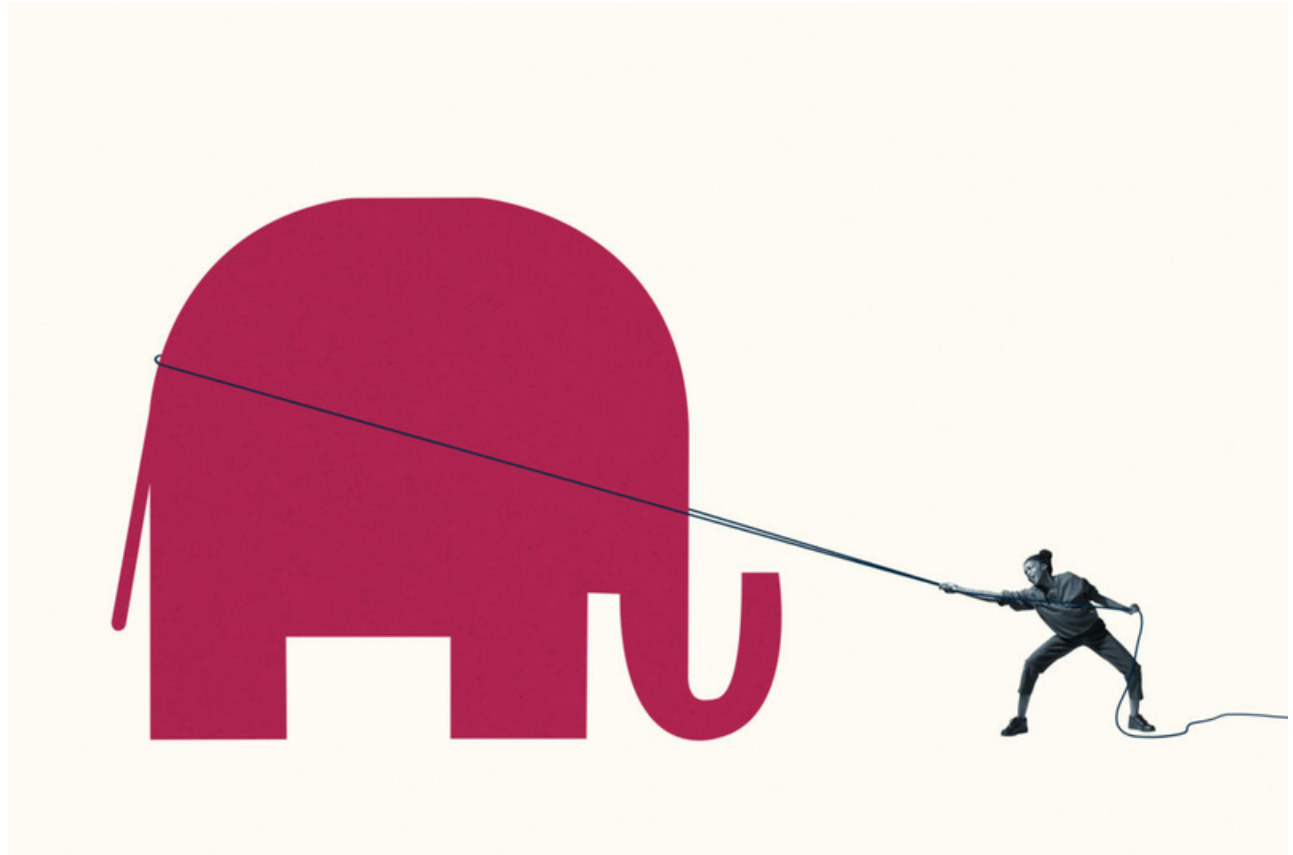
**It's a both-sides problem**, according to former Sen. Doug Jones, a moderate Democrat from Alabama who lost his reelection bid in 2020. But it's far more prevalent among Republicans, particularly those who support Donald Trump. A third of GOP voters — and 46% of people who believe the 2020 election was stolen from Trump — [agreed in October](#) that “true American patriots may have to resort to violence” to save the country, compared to just 23% of respondents overall.

“Look, I believe there are some in this — who will go unnamed, but initials are D.T. — [who] have an intent,” Jones said during a forum sponsored by the left-wing Center for American Progress and the nonpartisan McCain Institute. “They know exactly what they’re saying. How do we look at that? How do we talk when you’ve got political leaders that are out there who are literally calling for the execution of a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who are [calling their political opponents vermin](#) that needs to be exterminated? That is a clear signal to folks.”

The country’s political divisions predate Trump, but they splintered further under his watch, ultimately leading to the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, said

former Rep. Barbara Comstock, a moderate Republican. As proof, Comstock pointed to this year's Republican election losses in her home state of Virginia, which did not spark similar backlash among voters or state officials.

"Surprise: When Donald Trump's not on the ballot, the voting all goes really securely and safely," she said.



*Literally, the elephant in the room.  
(Illustration by Getty Images)*

**Republicans seem generally aware of the setbacks they've suffered because of Trump**, even as they struggle to address them. In Minnesota, where Republicans control nothing and haven't won a statewide race since 2006, operatives easily identified the party's main problems: Messaging, MAGA, and money. But they have no idea how to fix any of it, [the Minnesota Reformer reported](#).

"We're just lost," said Amy Koch, a Republican lobbyist and former Senate majority leader. "I don't know how we pull out of this."

**In fairness, it's more complicated than it may seem.** The problems are a tangled mess that compound and feed off each other, making it difficult to

identify an easy starting point. For example, the party's fundraising woes — \$145,000 cash on hand, \$414,000 in debt [as of October](#) — stem from cringeworthy messaging, like branding COVID-19 vaccines as “[death shots](#),” ranting about schools “[teaching kids to be gay](#)” and whining about the 2020 election [being stolen](#). But that rhetoric appeals to the far-right faithful, leaving many politicians wary of abandoning it for new (and better) talking points.

The problem is that rhetoric isn't a policy platform — it's just screaming into the void. And that might placate the angry MAGA masses, but it repels droves of mainstream voters, Koch said.

“It's not something people want to give money to when you're just angry all the time and you don't stand for anything and you're not winning,” she said. “This is just angry people. Why would anybody want to get engaged with the party?”



*“Engage with me!”*

*(Photo by Mary Ann Chastain/Special to the SC Daily Gazette)*

**Messaging is also an ongoing struggle for three of the four remaining GOP presidential hopefuls**, who each trail Trump by [more than 40 points](#) but are still reluctant to attack him. In a way, this makes sense — winning a Republican primary requires courting the ultraconservative base, which tends to punish anyone who disparages Trump. (Case in point: Former New Jersey Gov. Chris



Christie, who based his campaign on the premise that Trump is unfit for office and is currently polling at 2.8% among GOP primary voters.) Still, it's an odd dynamic that looks more like a race for second place than a contest for the presidency.

This week, for example, Vivek Ramaswamy and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis teamed up against former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, claiming her campaign was bolstered by wealthy Wall Street liberals, [the South Carolina Daily Gazette reported](#). (Haley is in third place in national polls, 1 percentage point behind DeSantis and 47 behind Trump.) The attacks followed a flood of articles highlighting [Haley's ties](#) to [investment banks](#) and megadonors who funneled [six-figure contributions](#) to political action committees supporting her campaign.

**Haley shrugged off the criticism** Wednesday, saying her general policy was to accept donations from anyone inclined to support her candidacy. Collectively, more than 150,000 individual donors have contributed to that effort, pledging less than \$100 apiece on average, a spokesman said Thursday.

"We're proud of our support from hardworking Americans who are inspired by Nikki's conservative message," he said. "Nikki is surging because people like her strong foreign policy, her record as a job creator, her plan to combat inflation, and her call to move on from the drama and chaos of the past."

**Probably none of this will matter in the end.** Trump supporters likely won't be thrilled by Haley's ties to Wall Street, but Trump supporters likely aren't thrilled by Haley in general. Her core constituency will be people seeking an alternative to Trump, who won't care nearly as much about the specifics of campaign donations, said Dave Woodard, a retired Clemson University professor and Republican consultant.

"I think that's too particular for voters," he said. "Are they going to vote for, I dunno, another candidate over her over that? I don't think so."

**Particulars:** [Bill in Alabama Legislature would prohibit mask mandates ... GOP seeking to head off ballot initiatives on abortion access, Florida's included ... Georgia lawmakers close redistricting session; judge to decide if GOP-crafted maps comply with order ... Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb defends LEAP pipeline, prepares for last legislative session ... Kentucky lawmakers are pre-filing bills ahead of the 2024 session, but they're not easy to find ... Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear's inauguration is next week. Here's the schedule. ... Final two sentences](#)

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## Also Trending

Librarians and teachers in Wisconsin who provide kids with nebulously defined “obscene materials” could be liable for felony charges under a Republican-backed bill making its way through the legislature, [the Wisconsin Examiner reported](#).



*Someone's going to jail for that.  
(Photo by Getty Images)*

[The proposal](#), debated Thursday in a Republican-majority Assembly committee, would remove protections that exempt librarians and teachers from prosecution under the state's obscene materials law in the interest of promoting a free flow of

literary and educational materials. Per the bill, “obscene material” would include any writing, picture, film or recording that depicts sexual conduct in an “offensive” way; might cause “immoderate or unwholesome desires,” or lacks serious literary, artistic, political, educational or scientific value.

**It is, in other words, a bowl of messy word salad** that would leave school employees open to felony charges based on subjective interpretations of what constitutes obscenity. Should it pass, the bill would have an immediate chilling effect, prompting schools to pull hundreds of books from library shelves in hopes of avoiding even a whiff of controversy that could land staffers in court. This is the entire point, even if Republicans would prefer you believe otherwise.

“I’m grateful for the public hearing as there are many who suggest that there are no obscene materials in our schools and that this bill is just about book bans and political agendas,” state Rep. Scott Allen, a Republican and one of the bill’s sponsors, said Thursday. “As you’ll hear today from other testifiers, there are many parents and educators who have become concerned at how students can encounter sexually explicit material at school.”

No one testified against the bill in person, though 10 groups [registered against it](#), including the American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin and multiple organizations representing school administrators, nurses and librarians. But Democrats voiced opposition to the proposal, warning that the policy would empower the state to dictate community-level policy, regardless of what the community itself might prefer (or consider obscene). Allen brushed aside that concern. Obscene is obscene, he said.

**Republicans heartily concurred.** One lawmaker said the proposal “doesn’t go far enough” in policing content writ large, noting that “a naked bike ride wouldn’t fly” in one city but “might be seen as totally acceptable” in others. Another waxed nostalgic for the golden age of modesty, when “Elvis Presley shaking his leg” was the peak of scandalous content.

“Can we go back to that?” he pleaded. “Because I think we’ve gone too far.”

**Indeed we have:** [Inflation, insurance costs expected to take bigger portion of Alabama higher ed budget ... U.S. secretary of education, visiting Iowa, discusses importance of teacher apprenticeships ... Iowa private university leaders, advocates wary of potential changes to state tuition grants ... Michigan](#)

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## One Last Thing

Kevin Costner [might be dating Jewel](#), which feels, somehow, like exactly the news we need.

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