

News From The States

EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

Do you ever feel like time just drags on and on and on until suddenly you blink there are only three real contenders for the GOP nomination and one of them is Donald Trump and one of them is Ron DeSantis and one of them is shouting URLs from a debate stage which is all new and terrible and yet somehow feels like a spectacle we have been watching for a thousand years?

Anyone?



The Big Takeaway

Ron DeSantis and Nikki Haley met alone on a debate stage for the first time Wednesday, offering undecided voters a clear glimpse of what a post-MAGA Republican Party might look like. What a moment! What an event! What an inaccurate description of what actually happened!



No.

(Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

What really went down was this: DeSantis and Haley bickered for two hours, questioning each other's competence and arguing over which of them is the bigger liar, [our D.C. bureau reported](#). Both once again avoided direct criticism of Donald Trump, who once again skipped the debate to hold a concurrent town hall on Fox News. And really, who can blame him? If my opponents were busy destroying each other, I, too, would leave them to it.

The CNN-hosted debate came just five days ahead of the Iowa caucuses, where Trump holds a [35-point lead](#) over both Haley and DeSantis. Traditional campaign strategy dictates that you can't attack the frontrunner until you've eliminated the other hopefuls, which explains why Haley and DeSantis are still focusing on each other instead of Trump. But this is not a traditional campaign. The frontrunner faces 91 felony charges, many of them related to his very overt attempts to overturn his last election loss. Ignoring the low-hanging fruit to attack another guy for exaggerating his track record seems a little weird, you know?

Not to DeSantis and Haley, I guess. (Miss you, [Chris Christie](#).) Freed of the obligation to focus on the guy they're trying to dethrone, both headed into Wednesday with relatively modest goals. DeSantis needed (but did not find)

some sort of viral moment to reinvigorate his flagging campaign, which will [live or die](#) by his performance in Iowa. Things were simpler for Haley, who just had to avoid gaffes that could dent her second-place standing among likely caucusgoers. And she did, mostly, with one exception: “DeSantis Lies Dot Com,” an [actual cringe-worthy website](#) created by her that she would really, really like you to visit.



*They bought the domain name and everything!
(Photo by Virojt Changyencham/Getty Images)*

Like, *really*. Haley mentioned the site 16 times. That is a *lot of mentions* in a two-hour period. By the end of the night it had become a sort of mantra, washing over me until I was powerless to resist typing it (from memory, dot com) into my browser. The site is exactly what it sounds like — a list of “documented lies” from DeSantis, either about his own accomplishments (“DeSantis falsely claims he never gave Chinese companies government subsidies or recruited Chinese businesses”) or about Haley (“DeSantis falsely claims Hillary Clinton is Nikki Haley’s role model”), all categorized by subject under a banner welcoming you to DeSantis’ “world of lies.” (Like DisneyWorld, except instead of a magical kingdom it’s a terrible website.)

The point of this dumb gimmick was to give Haley a quick rebuttal to DeSantis’

attacks without having to debunk them point by point onstage. And it might have worked, if not for the enormous elephant sucking up all the oxygen in the room. Because, really? You're going to create *an entire website* about DeSantis lying but not even *mention* Trump, the frontrunner who told [more than 30,000 lies](#) in a single four-year term? *Really?*



Do we restart the tally if he wins, or just add the old one?

(Photo by Joe Raedle/Getty Images)

Meanwhile, over on Fox News, Trump said he's "not going to be a dictator," debunking a "narrative" created by people after he said he would be a dictator "only" on the first day of his second term. He also claimed his [warning of "bedlam"](#) was just a fun new nickname for President Joe Biden, said he'd be too busy as president to follow up on his own promises of "retribution," and sort-but-not-really denounced political violence by acknowledging "Of course, that's right" when asked if it was unacceptable, then denying that it had [been a problem](#) during his presidency.

Oh, and as for Haley? He's "not exactly worried" about her. Of course, that was before he'd heard about the website.

A Republican member of the Maryland Board of Elections was arrested and charged Tuesday for his alleged role in the Jan. 6, 2021 riot at the U.S. Capitol, a

politically violent attempt to prolong Trump's presidency that took place during Trump's presidency (*hmmm*). Carlos Ayala, 52, faces a felony charge of civil disorder and a handful of related misdemeanor charges, including knowingly entering a restricted building and impeding the orderly conduct of government business, [Maryland Matters reported](#).



*Wasn't a problem on Trump's watch, though.
(Photo by Brent Stirton/Getty Images)*

Ayala was identified as one of a group of rioters illegally gathered on restricted Capitol grounds near the scaffolding erected for Biden's inauguration, according to court documents. He wore a sweatshirt hood cinched tightly around his head, a gray 3M-style painter's mask and carried, at times, a distinctive black and white flag affixed to a PVC-pipe flagpole bearing the words "We the People" and "DEFEND" alongside an image of an M-16-style rifle. Video footage showed him climbing over police barricades to the Senate side of the Capitol and then waving the flag inside a window before moving to a door, where he jabbed the flagpole at a Capitol Police officer, according to the Department of Justice. Minutes later, he paced in front of officers assembled on the Upper West Terrace, gesturing and encouraging them to "join us," per the 13-page charging document.

Ayala made an initial appearance in the District of Columbia and was released on personal recognizance. He cannot possess firearms while out on bail and must ask permission to leave the state pending trial. His attorney is James “Jim” M. Trusty, a former Trump lawyer who declined to comment on the case.

Ayala resigned from the Board of Elections Thursday morning. He was confirmed last spring for a four-year term after being appointed by Gov. Wes Moore, a Democrat, on the recommendation of the Maryland Republican Party. Moore had previously rejected two other nominees, one of whom was a prominent [2020 election denier](#). Moore’s office declined to comment Thursday.

Nevada Secretary of State Francisco Aguilar *tried* to avoid commenting

Wednesday on the state Republican Party’s decision to hold its own caucus in defiance of a state law requiring a primary, but it was sort of hard to pull off in a media briefing focused on election security for the upcoming primary. Still, he avoided direct criticism, saying only that lawmakers will probably have to address the issue at some point, [the Nevada Current reported](#).



Not their mess.

(Photo by April Corbin Girnus/Nevada Current)

“There is a conversation that needs to be had at the ‘25 Legislative Session to say: What do we want to do moving forward?” he said.

Lawmakers already *did* this back in 2021, when a [bipartisan majority](#) approved a bill requiring a presidential primary contest, rather than a caucus, for major political parties with more than one candidate. The law requires that primary to be administered by the state but does not forbid political parties from holding their own caucuses. Republicans still objected to it, claiming [in a lawsuit](#) Democrats were attempting to “force” Republicans to “change the way we choose our presidential nominee. The party later dropped the suit and then scheduled a caucus for Feb. 8, two days after the primary. [New caucus rules](#) bar candidates from participating in both contests, and only those who choose the caucus are eligible to receive delegates, rendering the primary essentially meaningless for Republican candidates.

The result is a confusing three-day stretch with two contests featuring different rosters of candidates that most voters probably don’t know about and won’t understand. Both state and county election officials have tried to stem the inevitable tide of confusion by circulating mailers explaining the distinction between the two events, but ultimately, answering questions about the caucus really isn’t their responsibility, Aguilar said.

“We really relied on the party to message its members about the caucus process,” he said. “We are here and we are responsible to run the primary, to make sure [people] understand why we do the primary and the way we do it.”

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Also Trending

The good news: There is finally a prescription pill specifically for postpartum depression, and it works within two weeks — more than twice as fast as traditional antidepressants. The bad news: It costs \$16,000 (because: America) and hasn't been widely adopted by state Medicaid agencies (because: America), rendering it inaccessible to millions of minority and low-income patients who need it, [Stateline reported](#).



*Roughly 1 in 8 women suffer from postpartum depression.
(Photo by John Moore/Getty Images)*

There are other treatment options for postpartum depression, including therapy and a host of other antidepressants. But the new drug, marketed under the brand name Zurzuva, is the first pill — and only the second medication — approved by the Food and Drug Administration specifically for the condition. (The other one — Zulresso — costs more than twice as much and requires a 60-hour hospital stay for an IV treatment, which can only be administered with insurance approval and at a certified facility. Just writing that made me tired.)

About [1 in 8](#) women experience symptoms of postpartum depression, according

to [federal data](#). [Suicide](#) and drug overdoses are among the leading causes of pregnancy-related death, defined as death during pregnancy, labor or within the first year of childbirth. Black, Indigenous, Hispanic and low-income women are more likely to be affected. They are also more likely to have health coverage through Medicaid, which covers 41% of births [nationwide](#) and more than two-thirds of Black and Indigenous births.

Some state Medicaid agencies haven't yet adopted a policy for Zurzuvae, which became available by prescription last month. Others said they automatically add FDA-approved drugs to their preferred drug lists, though some require prior authorization.

As of last month, only 17 insurers in at least 14 states — less than 1% of the nation's 1,000 private insurance companies — had published coverage guidelines for Zurzuvae, according to an [analysis](#) by the Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health. Five of the 17 companies said they will require patients to try a different medication first. Three will mandate that psychiatrists prescribe Zurzuvae, though OB-GYNs can and do treat perinatal and postpartum depression, per the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

"I'm really hopeful that there will not be excessive restrictions in terms of especially burdensome authorization processes or availability," said Dr. Leena Mittall, a psychiatrist and chief of the Division of Women's Mental Health at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. "If somebody's seeking treatment or help, that we have multiple points of entry into care."

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One Last Thing

[The “Mean Girls” remake](#) — which is not really a remake, per se, but rather a movie adaptation of the Broadway musical based on the original film — is, as one might expect, pretty much just “Mean Girls” with songs. Is butter a carb? Probably not, but I still trust the original cast to figure it out.

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