

News From The States

EVENING WRAP

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By [Sean Scully](#)

It's Tuesday and we're back to our busy non-holiday lives. Someone mentioned that there was some kind of election last night. Let's find out.



The Big Takeaway

Former President Donald Trump scored his first victory of the primary season with a mere 30-point drubbing of his nearest rivals in the Iowa Caucuses, [the Iowa Capital Dispatch reports](#). Trump more than doubled the other candidates in the field – combined.

“Iowa, we love you,” Trump said as the crowd at his Des Moines victory party cheered. “You are beautiful. You just go out and buy larger tractors and more land, don’t worry about it.”



*Thank you, Iowa. Now go buy some tractors or something.
(Photo by Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images)*

In returns from the caucus sites, the Republican front-runner was leading with 51.1% of the vote, nearly 30 percentage points ahead of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis at 21.2%. The margin of victory broke the record of 12 points set by Bob Dole in 1988, the Capital Dispatch writes.

DeSantis had bet big on Iowa to save what appears to be a floundering campaign. His second-place showing didn't hurt but it didn't exactly help either, analysts say. The race was such a runaway for Trump that the Associated Press, [the national gold-standard for calling the results of races](#), barely bothered to wait before declaring Trump the victor, at around 7:30 p.m. Central Time.

That didn't sit well with DeSantis, who used his own "victory" party to denounce the news media for not waiting until every vote was counted, [the Capital Dispatch reported](#).

"The media was against us. ... They even called the election before people even got a chance to vote, but they were just so excited about the fact that they were predicting that we wouldn't be able to get our ticket punched here out of Iowa," DeSantis said. "But I can tell you, because of your support, and in spite of all of

that they threw at us, everyone against us, we've got our ticket punched out of Iowa."

DeSantis rejected speculation that he would drop out following his just-barely second place finish, vowing to compete in the New Hampshire primaries in a week.

"People want to have hope for this country's future, and that's what we represent," DeSantis said. "We represent a chance to reverse the madness that we've seen in this country, to reverse the decline of this country and to give this country a new birth of freedom and a restoration of sanity. That's what we are going to do."



This is definitely the media's fault.
(Photo by Scott Olson/Getty Images)

Despite coming in third, with about 19.1% support, Haley declared victory.

"The pundits will analyze the results from every angle. We get that. But when you look at how we're doing in New Hampshire, in South Carolina and beyond, I can safely say tonight I will make this Republican primary a two person race," Haley said [before heading to New Hampshire](#), where she hopes to surge to second place.

“And as we head to New Hampshire I have one more thing to say: underestimate me because that’s always fun,” she told supporters in Iowa, repeating her campaign’s rallying cry.



Third place? That's practically the same as winning!
(Photo by Joe Raedle/Getty Images)

Further down the results list, entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy celebrated his fourth-place showing by dropping out of the race and endorsing Trump. He managed to get around 7.7% support, according to partial returns, [the Capital Dispatch reported](#).

“We’ve looked at it every which way, and I think it is true that we did not achieve the surprise that we wanted to deliver tonight,” Ramaswamy said in his most matter-of-fact statement to date.

Meanwhile in Arkansas, voters were suddenly reminded that former Gov. Asa Hutchinson was running for president by his announcement that he was dropping out of the race, [the Arkansas Advocate reports](#).

Hutchinson did so poorly in Iowa, well under 1%, that most news organizations lumped him with “Other” on results charts.

In withdrawing, he was unapologetic about his campaign tactic of criticizing Donald Trump, which probably helped make sure he was a non-factor in the race.

“My message of being a principled Republican with experience and telling the truth about the current front runner did not sell in Iowa,” Hutchinson said. “I stand by the campaign I ran. I answered every question, sounded the warning to the GOP about the risks in 2024 and presented hope for our country’s future.



You still don't know who I am, do you?
(Photo by John Sykes/Arkansas Advocate)

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Also Trending

They cost \$70 million and promised to revitalize agriculture in rural Oregon, help the environment by removing trucks from the interstate, and save farmers money.

So after seven years of planning and development and tens of millions in cost overruns, the state's first two agricultural truck-to-rail depots have produced, well, nothing, [the Oregon Capital Chronicle reports](#).

"Today, the money's been spent and neither the public, nor farmers, have benefited," the Capital Chronicle writes. "The centers, essentially truck-to-rail transfer stations that were supposed to deliver onions, hay and grass seed to seaports in Seattle and Tacoma, and to major cities in the Midwest and the East Coast, sit unoccupied. Not a single truck has been taken off the road, and not a single pound of cargo has been shipped. Two companies that initially agreed to run the depots have both walked, and no one has stepped in to replace them."

Experts had warned legislators that the two depots were a bad idea. The Willamette Valley depot in Millersburg was in a poor location and would struggle to attract the shipping containers needed to haul the hay and grass seed produced in the area to ports in Washington state. The Treasure Valley Reload Center was supposed to serve the area's onion growers, but experts warned that it would need to serve more than a single agricultural crop.



It's 10 months late and \$10 million over budget and is completely abandoned, but otherwise this big new transportation hub is doing great.

(Photo by Alex Baumhardt/Oregon Capital Chronicle)

And those experts were right. Today both sites sit abandoned, with no plans for ever opening.

State officials are taking the most sensible possible approach to such an obvious and massive failure: They are blaming each other.

State Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, pushed his colleagues to fund the centers and he was later hired to run one of them. He now says he always knew the depots would face a hard path to success.

“I knew that the distance issue between Millersburg and (Seattle and Tacoma), economically, was going to be very, very hard to overcome,” he said. “After that, I mean, I didn’t have anything to do with the design, I didn’t have anything to do with the negotiations or contracts.”

The Oregon Department of Transportation says legislators handed the agency a task it was not ready for.

“These were new facilities, and ODOT does not have and did not have a lot of

experience with these kinds of facilities,” said Erik Havig, statewide policy and planning manager at the transportation department. “We did the best we could with the information we had.”

Local officials, however, take a slightly sunnier view, insisting that the sites could one day fulfill their promise.

“We are not happy with how things have gone thus far, but we are determined to put this property to productive use as soon as possible,” Jon Kloor, chair of the Mid-Willamette Valley Intermodal Center Board and the Linn County Economic Development Group Board, said in an email. “The basic premise that led to the Department of Transportation supporting this project and a similar project in eastern Oregon remains true today.”



*I do not like this one bit. I really, really don't like this one bit.
(Photo by John Severson/U.S. Geological Survey)*

In other depressing infrastructure news, a new study reports that Alaska's caribou hate roads – like really, really hate them. To the point that they are reluctant to cross roads even when no vehicles are in sight, [the Alaska Beacon](#)

[reports.](#)

That suggests that even supposedly low-intensity oil development in Alaska's remote North Slope can gravely threaten the vitality of the state's herds.

"Caribou are really sensitive. They're really sensitive to human activity. And we've seen from past studies that they're also sensitive to human infrastructure, and they really respond to it," said Heather Johnson, a U.S. Geological Survey biologist who coauthored the study. "The key takeaway from the paper is they're more sensitive to road activity than we had previously recognized."

The study tracked the movements of animals in the 34,000-member Central Arctic Caribou Herd. They found that not only do the caribou not like to cross roads, they don't even like being near them. Mothers during the critical calving season would stay up to two miles away from the nearest road while giving birth.

Why and how the caribou arrived at their distaste for roads, even lightly traveled ones, is not clear, scientists say, but the findings are undeniable.

"Sometimes they'll just stand there," when confronted by a road, said USGS biologist John Severson, who coauthored the study. "Sometimes it seems like they kind of get freaked out and kind of run around a little bit. But it varies."



Remember those big budget cuts? Well, here's a little spare change to ease the pain. You're welcome, Maryland.

(Photo by Bryan P. Sears/Maryland Matters)

Maryland's governor, meanwhile, is hoping to calm some of the furor from local officials and legislators after the state's transportation department announced draconian funding cuts to planned projects late last year, [Maryland Matters reports](#).

Maryland Transportation Secretary Paul Wiedefeld stunned local officials in December by announcing the need to cut \$3.3 billion in planned projects because of declining gas tax revenue for the state's dedicated Transportation Trust Fund.

This week, however, he said the governor will dedicate \$150 million in additional transportation funding in the 2025 budget to ease those cuts.

"I think everyone recognizes that with the Transportation Trust Fund. Some of the fundamentals are still there, meaning a declining revenue base," Wiedefeld told reporters. "...Then operating costs and capital costs going up, and need, right? Just the cost of what we do today goes up, and then the need for all the things we want to do."

Of course, he admitted, this is just one-time money, leaving the total transportation cuts at an eye-popping \$3.1 billion. It will require some larger action to shore up the transportation fund.

"So that's a larger discussion," he said. "That's not what this is trying to address. This is trying to address some of the immediate concerns that we heard from across the state."

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One Last Thing

As we have mentioned previously, South Dakota's lieutenant governor is famously heavy-handed. Literally. He has a history of breaking his gavel as he presides over the state House. He's broken two so far, including one given to him by the governor and one crafted by his own hand.

Now, [the South Dakota Searchlight reports](#), friends and colleagues have been sending Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden possible replacements, including some that might be less vulnerable to his enthusiastic gavel-bashing.

"House Speaker Hugh Bartels surprised Rhoden with a new gavel ... before Noem was introduced for her State of the State address: a (perhaps indestructible?) aluminum gavel, which Rhoden called a 'Thor's hammer-type gavel,'" the Searchlight writes.

"Lake Area Technical College President Tiffany Sanderson had surprised Rhoden the night before with an alumni-made hickory gavel, which Rhoden said has a 'big old honkin' head,' A plaque on the back of the gavel's accompanying striker plate reads 'Warranty void if broken by Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden.'"

Rhoden is taking the gentle ribbing in stride.

"I was just tickled pink," he said. "Obviously I like woodwork and metalwork. To get quality gifts like that just made my week."



*Thor is gonna be pissed if you manage to break this gavel, Mr. Lieutenant Governor.
(Photo courtesy of Larry Rhoden)*

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