

News From The States

EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

I live in D.C., the capital of the most powerful country on the planet and also a city that is regularly and routinely crippled by the most minor of snowfalls. This is always irritating (Wisconsin would never, ever do this to me) but, in this case, also fitting. I mean, think of it: The seat of American democracy crippled by minor precipitation one day after voters braved [actual winter weather](#) to propel a twice-impeached four-times-indicted former president ever closer to the Republican presidential nomination. It's life imitating art, minus the art. So just life, I guess.



The Big Takeaway

[The results](#) of Monday's GOP caucuses were both historic and wholly predictable. As expected, Donald Trump triumphed, garnering 51% of the vote to finish 30 percentage points ahead of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis. His margin of victory more than doubled the previous record of 12.8 percentage points, set by Bob Dole in 1988; likewise, his slim majority of voters was the highest-ever support for a single candidate in a competitive caucus. Collectively, the nation reacted with a yawn. By the numbers, it was an unprecedented showing. Politically, it's just another day at the MAGA circus.



*Life in the circus: Counting caucus ballots even though the caucus had already been called for Trump.
(Photo by Robin Opsahl/Iowa Capital Dispatch)*

It isn't all sunshine and roses for Trump, either. The caucuses underscored his hold on the GOP, but the win made it clear that he's more of a challenged incumbent than a regular candidate, experts [told the Iowa Capital Dispatch](#).

"Even though Trump isn't actually an incumbent, he effectively is, you know, a former president running for a second non-consecutive term," said Tim Hagle, a political science professor at the University of Iowa. "And given his support, and everything that's going on, he basically was running as an incumbent, because he refused to debate the other people and wasn't appearing with them at multicandidate events."

The results prove what we've long known, which is that Trump is (and has been) the favorite. But it's hard to extrapolate beyond that. Caucuses are weird, hours-long events that take place on weeknights, when most people would prefer to be at home with their families instead of yelling about politics in a high school gymnasium. Participation is always lower than in a traditional primary, but turnout took a noticeable dive this year amid [subzero temperatures](#) and the

overall air of inevitability. All of those conditions favored Trump, whose supporters are by far the most likely to risk frostbite and gangrene for the chance to holler about his candidacy.



They're nothing if not enthusiastic!
(Photo by Brent Stirton/Getty Images)

We'll have a clearer picture after next week's primary in New Hampshire, the only early state where polling indicates an even slightly competitive race. Trump's the favorite there, too – but his lead is [13 points](#) (not 30), and the second-place contender is Nikki Haley (not DeSantis). Haley generally polls better among moderate and anti-Trump Republicans, who traditionally wield outsized influence in New Hampshire's [open primary process](#). But polling does not portend participation, said Chris Larimer, a political science professor at the University of Northern Iowa.

“She may have more positive feelings among Democrats and independents, but I just wonder about the level of voter enthusiasm for those two groups of voters to go to participate,” he said. “I think it's easier for them to say, ‘Hey, I'm willing to do that in a primary because it's easier to participate,’ but I still think there needs to be a little bit of a nudge to get them out.”

Political enthusiasm began a slow death Tuesday in Louisiana as lawmakers advanced a bill to close the state’s primary elections, effectively blocking participation among third-party and independent voters – even the ones who don’t require nudging, [per the Louisiana Illuminator](#). The proposal was introduced at the request of Gov. Jeff Landry, a Republican who said the change would help Louisiana compete with its “fellow Southern states,” which “are succeeding” because their “primary process” produces “a stronger, more unified team of elected leaders.”

This doesn’t make sense, which is fine because it also isn’t true. [Seventeen states](#) have closed primaries, but only three of those — Florida, Kentucky and Maryland — are Southern. (And then only [technically](#).) Most of the rest have some form of an open primary process, except for Nebraska (where candidates are theoretically nonpartisan) and California, Washington and Louisiana, which employ “jungle”-type primaries that pit candidates against each other regardless of party affiliation. If no one garners a majority of votes, the top two candidates advance to a runoff in the general election.



ASTERISK

(Photo by Greg LaRose/Louisiana Illuminator)

[Landry’s proposal](#) would upend that system in favor of partisan primaries — one

for Democratic candidates, selected by registered Democrats; and one for Republican candidates, selected by registered Republicans. (Party leaders would have the option to expand participation to unaffiliated voters.) The winners of those contests would then face off in the general election. The change would apply to all congressional and statewide races, including legislative and judicial offices.

The idea is wildly unpopular among voters. More than half oppose the change, and nearly two-thirds prefer the current system, according to a recent poll. Lawmakers were similarly concerned about the proposal, which would prohibit primary participation for more than 820,000 unaffiliated voters — roughly 27% of the state's electorate, and far more than the 548,000 who put Landry in office.

State Rep. Josh Carlson batted away those figures. No one can claim disenfranchisement when they're still able to vote in the general election, he said.

"Every registered voter in the general election is still going to have the ability for their vote to count," said Carlson, a Republican. "We're not talking about any system that would disenfranchise any voter, take away their ability to vote."



*Four women, one man, no benefits and privileges.
(Photo by Noah Taborda/Kansas Reflector)*

Kansas Republicans will convene this month to vote on a proposed party platform that opposes same-sex marriage, one of many “societal ills” caused by “godlessness and the resultant broken family structure,” [the Kansas Reflector reported](#).

“Government cannot replace God or the traditional family,” the unreleased document continues in what appears to be a thinly veiled reference to the 2015 [U.S. Supreme Court decision](#) legalizing gay marriage. Legislatures and judges, it adds, should not approve marriage-like arrangements for “non-traditional” families, because “children’s future is best preserved within the traditional understanding of marriage.”

That definition of marriage — one man, one woman, as “created” by God — should be enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, according to the platform, which also reinterprets the Kansas Constitution as imbuing the “benefits and privileges of marriage” only to unions consisting of “one man and one woman.”

The proposal, which also condemns abortion and gun control, will be up for consideration at the Kansas GOP convention on Jan. 26 and Jan. 27. Mike Brown, the party's chairman, did not respond to requests for comment.

It's a no from me: [Florida GOP lawmakers: Flying a Pride flag, a BLM flag, 'has no place inside of our government buildings' ... Do Florida voters want to repeal public financing of statewide elections for governor, Cabinet members? ... U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson and Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry split on new congressional districts ... Anti-super PAC campaign raises over \\$1 million for Maine referendum effort ... Effort to place term limits on Congress advances in Maine legislature ... Maine court declines to rule in Trump ballot case before US Supreme Court ... Redistricting commission begins redrawing Detroit-area state House maps ... The Reeves-Presley 2023 campaign was the most expensive governor's race in Mississippi state history ... 'Stinks quite a bit': Missouri Gov. Mike Parson accused of illegally using office to meddle in primaries ... How New York's governor upends bills before signing them ... North Carolina GOP candidate with alleged neo-Nazi connections allowed to stay on the ballot ... Auditors find no fraud in South Carolina election process, but make some clean-up suggestions ... Noem's phonics literacy effort advances in South Dakota Legislature ... The next fight in Tennessee's campaign finance disclosure laws ... Defend Texas Liberty promised big primary spending. Then its leader met with an Adolf Hitler fan. ... Colin Allred, Democratic candidate for U.S. Senate in Texas, raises \\$4.8 million in fourth quarter of 2023 ... Virginia Senate elections panel debates toughening rules on 'sore losers'](#)



Also Trending

As Alabama's population ages, its statewide K-12 enrollment declines — but it doesn't happen evenly, [the Alabama Reflector reported](#). From 2014 to 2023, overall enrollment fell by 2.5%. But the decline was much steeper in [rural counties](#), where the student population dropped from 35,911 in 2014 to 28,785 in 2023 — a 19.8% decrease.



The entrance of Kinterbish Jr. High School in Cuba, Ala. on Thursday, Nov. 16, 2023. Sumter County Schools is shutting down Kinterbish, the second school to close in six years, amid a significant drop in its school-age population.

(Photo by Will McLelland for the Alabama Reflector)

When the student population shrinks, so does the district itself. Funding stalls. Facilities fall into disrepair. Schools close. Extracurricular activities are cut. For rural areas, that's a death knell, according to Marcy Burroughs, superintendent of Sumter County Schools.

"And so when we have students who leave or parents who move away for better job opportunities, then that does cause a strain on the district because those funds leave with those students," she said.

The decline has been particularly precipitous in Sumter County, which had just [990](#) students enrolled in the 2022-23 school year, a 41% drop from [2014-15](#). Roughly [89%](#) of the remaining students are economically disadvantaged, compared [to 65% statewide](#). The dwindling numbers typically result in funding decreases, thanks to models that tie budget allocations (directly or indirectly) to student populations. In Alabama, where local governments can raise little revenue for schools via property taxes, the funding shortages eventually become insurmountable.

“There’s always talk about changing the foundation program and, certainly, if there’s a strong push to rewrite it in the coming years I’m sure that that the whole rural versus urban will be a part of the discussion, but I don’t have any particular advice on that at the moment,” said State Schools Superintendent Eric Mackey.

High-poverty schools can access federal money known as Title I funds. But the money is generally not stable enough to fund teacher salaries, leaving districts like Sumter plagued with vacancies.

“We don’t have the funds to pay teachers or teacher salary long-term,” she said.

In the meantime, Sumter County educators do what they can to improve conditions for their students. Parts of a junior high school are closed for renovations, including painting, flooring and work on restrooms and ceilings. Any update is a good update, said Marcus West, the school’s principal.

“Any kind of upgrade makes kids feel more welcome,” he said.

Renovations: [As legislative session opens, Alaska House Republicans reject attempt to override school funds veto ...](#) [Arkansas schools compress salary schedules in response to LEARNS Act ...](#) [Indiana lawmakers seem unlikely to tackle school consolidation in 2024 session ...](#) [Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey pushes \\$93m boost in new child care spending ...](#) [Coalition pushing to improve literacy rates for St. Louis Public Schools ...](#) [New Hampshire Republicans file ‘Honesty in Education Act,’ reviving debate over parental disclosures ...](#) [Free school lunch program to expand in New Jersey public, private schools ...](#) [New Mexico lawmakers and governor have multiple proposals to reform public education ...](#) [Innovative early college high school program to help fill healthcare job vacancies in North Carolina ...](#) [The fight to feed kids in Ohio continues ...](#) [Oklahoma lawmakers to consider expanding school meal programs, but GOP views vary ...](#) [Texas’ school ratings remain in limbo as the state and school districts fight over how strict the grading should be ...](#) [First lady Jill Biden cheers educator wellness efforts in Utah visit ...](#) [Teachers’ choice to teach intelligent design would be protected under West Virginia bill — at teens’ request](#)



From The Newsrooms

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- [Arizona spending on Super Bowl, golf tickets to woo CEOs is unconstitutional, says AG](#)
- [Should Utah's 'high-performing' teachers get paid up to 100K?](#)
- [Property fee cut from controversial wildfire funding proposal in Oregon, but big timber could still get break](#)
- [Iowa care facility cited for ignoring aides' concerns prior to woman's death](#)



One Last Thing

Scientists traced the steps of a woolly mammoth from her [14,000-year-old tusk](#), which told them that she strolled from Canada to Alaska before being killed by hunters. I am underwhelmed.

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