

News From The States

EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

A week ago it was snowing, and today, it is 70 degrees, so honestly, I don't really even know what is happening?

Unless you want to talk politics, of course. I'm always up to date on that.



The Big Takeaway

Senate Republicans said Thursday they would continue negotiations on a bipartisan immigration package despite pressure from Donald Trump to scuttle the measure ahead of this year's presidential election. Debate over the deal, which would trade GOP-backed border security measures for \$106 billion in global security funding, is at a "critical moment," U.S. Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) told [our bureau in D.C.](#)

"If we can't get there, then we'll go to Plan B," he said.



*U.S. Sens. John Thune (R-S.D.) and Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), staring into the abyss.
(Photo by Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images)*

Really, there is no Plan B. Lawmakers have been haggling over Plan A [since November](#), when Republicans demanded stringent border security measures in exchange for supporting a supplemental aid package that includes \$60 billion in [funding for Ukraine](#). Negotiators seemed close to striking a final deal as of Tuesday, when Senate leaders [reiterated their support](#) for the plan and urged lawmakers to approve it quickly.

That night, Trump [won the New Hampshire primary](#), effectively clinching the GOP nomination. By Wednesday, “the politics” of the deal had “changed,” Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell told Republicans in a closed-door meeting.

Mostly, he meant Trump, who had spent weeks complaining about the border deal, both [on Truth Social](#) (lol) and in private calls to lawmakers. Some Republicans had already begun to waver on the (unfinished and unreleased) deal, even as they [criticized](#) the Biden administration for failing to secure the border. For the most part, congressional leaders and negotiators had managed to avoid the chaos, but with Trump as the presumptive nominee, that’s far more difficult for Republicans.



*Like a terrible version of Santa Claus, he's always watching.
(Photo by Scott Olson/Getty Images)*

Because Trump has made it clear that he'd prefer the border remain chaotic, giving him an easy attack to levy against President Joe Biden. Put another way, Trump wants Republicans to tank a substantive, bipartisan solution to a problem they've prioritized for years, solely to boost his own political prospects. As nefarious schemes go, this one is pretty bad — he's explaining it in real time, for one thing, and it'll be pretty hard for Republicans to continue campaigning on border security once they scuttle a real chance to enhance it, particularly after Biden's [vocal support](#) of the negotiation process.

But none of that matters in Trumpworld, a terrible place with just one rule: He barks, and Republicans scurry to appease him, no matter how [stupid the request](#). In this case, that means not “doing anything to undermine him,” McConnell told Republicans Wednesday.

GOP lawmakers have since downplayed those comments. Sen. James Lankford (R-Okla.), the top Republican negotiator on the bill, told reporters on Thursday that McConnell was simply “laying out the political realities” of congressional proceedings during “the middle of the presidential primary

season.” Later that day, McConnell clarified his remarks, assuring colleagues that he remained “personally fully engaged” in the process.

Still, the pressure campaign rankled. Sen. Mitt Romney (R-Utah) bristled Thursday at the audacity of Trump’s plan, which amounted to dissuading Republicans from solving the border crisis “because he wants to blame Biden for it,” [per the Utah News Dispatch](#).

“It’s really appalling,” Romney added. “The idea that someone running for president would say ‘Please hurt the country so I can blame my opponent and help my politics’ is a shocking development.”



Shocked, I tell you.

(Photo by Susan Walsh-Pool/Getty Images)

Trump responded hours later on Truth Social (lol), saying the country would be in a “far better place” once Romney retires from the Senate. They haven’t even spoken in years, he added.

“He knows nothing about me, or my views,” he said.

Then, just to make sure no one had forgotten those views, he laid them out *again*. The bipartisan immigration deal? A political ploy by the “Radical Left

Democrats,” who “don’t care about our Border” but “need it politically.” The *real* solution to the crisis? “If you want to have a really Secure Border, your ONLY HOPE is to vote for TRUMP2024.”

Republicans in Pennsylvania sought to do their part Thursday, filing a federal civil rights lawsuit against President Joe Biden, Gov. Josh Shapiro and state officials over a trio of executive actions designed to boost voter registration. Those orders usurped the state legislature’s constitutional authority to “determine the time, place, and manner” of conducting elections, according to the lawsuit, [the Pennsylvania Capital-Star reported](#).



IT'S YOUR ONLY HOPE
(Photo by Michala Butler/Pennsylvania Capital-Star)

The complaint, filed by 24 conservative state lawmakers, challenges the legality of an [executive order](#) issued by Biden in 2021 directing federal agencies to partner with third-party organizations to expand voter registration efforts and make it easier to obtain information about voting. It also challenges two state-level actions — a 2023 executive order issued by Shapiro to implement automatic voter registration, and [a 2018 directive](#) from the Department of State under then-Gov. Tom Wolf barring counties from rejecting voter registration applications solely because an applicant’s identifying numbers (driver’s license,

Social Security) don't match the government database.

Each action either conflicts with existing state law or did not receive the proper legislative approval, according to the lawsuit.

"The citizens of Pennsylvania have been victimized by extraordinary overreach of executive officials who have made changes to election laws with no authority to do so," state Rep. Dawn Keefer, a Republican and the lead plaintiff in the case, [said in a statement](#). "If we don't take action to stop this, there is no limit to the changes they might make to further erode Pennsylvania's election system in 2024 and beyond."

This is familiar ground for the plaintiffs, many of whom have filed other lawsuits seeking to overturn Pennsylvania's vote-by-mail law, protested the certification of the 2020 election and/or voted to contest the results. None of those efforts panned out. This case seems similarly doomed, hinging as it does on a far-right interpretation of the U.S. Constitution that has [already been rejected](#) by the U.S. Supreme Court, according to Adam Bonin, a Democratic election lawyer in Philadelphia.

"Once again, Republicans are trying to make it harder for people to vote, this time based on radical legal theories that straddle the border between kooky and wackadoodle," Bonin said. "They should instead be working on bipartisan solutions to make voting easier and counting faster."



Also Trending

Two brave Kansas Republicans spoke publicly about the safety of vaccines at a statehouse rally Thursday, calling on their fellow lawmakers to please just leave the state's [vaccine statutes](#) alone, [the Kansas Reflector reported](#).

"Leave the status quo alone, it has worked well and it has served us well for 50 years," said state Rep. John Eplee, a Republican from Atchison and a physician. "We just need to send a message to all our colleagues both in the House and Senate to keep their mitts off the statutes, because they're working."



*Vaccines are safe, but for me, needle photos are not, so here are some test tube things instead.
(Photo by Karen Ducey/Getty Images)*

Possibly, this was for an audience of one: State Sen. Mark Steffen, a Republican who introduced a pair of anti-vaccine bills on Wednesday. [The first](#) would bar businesses and schools from discriminating or denying services based on a person's "conscience-based refusal" of vaccines, while [the second](#) would restrict the authority of local governments to impose quarantines and other preventive policies designed to slow the spread of contagious diseases. The bills are retreads of failed proposals from the last legislative session, during which Steffen also advocated for treating COVID-19 with hydroxychloroquine ([a malaria drug](#)) and ivermectin ([neigh](#)).

State Sen. Kristen O'Shea, a Topeka Republican who serves with Steffen on the Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare, urged vaccine advocates (or even just people who can google a single actual fact about vaccines) to speak up during legislative hearings, "where a lot of dangerous legislative bills have been introduced, and not only entertained but cheered for."

"It's been a little lonely in my committee," O'Shea said. "We need your faces in the audience."



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One Last Thing

The royals are all in the hospital, but at least they can [visit each other](#), so that's nice.

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