

News From The States

EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

A lot of politics is, ultimately, just noise. This is an eternal truth — I still have not recovered from [John Edwards' haircut](#) — but it is also specific to Donald Trump, whose existence is the decibel equivalent of a foghorn blaring directly into your ear canal for eight years straight. At times you are tempted to think that the volume dial cannot possibly ratchet any higher, but you are always wrong, because *HONK* [91 felony charges](#) *HONK* [Hitler-approved talking points](#) *HONK* “you [can't charge me](#) for stuff I did as president” *HONK* [civil fraud trial](#) *HONK* seriously though has anyone seen [Melania](#) *HOOONK*.

We are, on some level, accustomed to the cacophony, but not so much that we stop hearing it. It is not background music — it is the soundtrack to the neverending drama of American politics. And right now, it's sounding an awful lot like 2020.



The Big Takeaway

I have less than zero interest in reliving any part of 2020, but 2020 will not be denied, at least politically. This year's presidential election will almost certainly be a retread of the last one, minus a pandemic and give or take a felony or two. It's possible the rematch could be derailed — by a criminal conviction, perhaps, or [a court decision](#) — but it's unlikely, given Trump's [massive lead](#) among primary

voters and also the thoroughly lackluster performance from his collective opposition.



*Prepare to be underwhelmed.
(Photo by Win McNamee/Getty Images)*

Until recently, most GOP primary candidates [avoided attacking Trump entirely](#); even now, their criticism is lukewarm and mostly limited to policy differences. Once upon a time we might have applauded that as a Return To Substantive Political Debate Or Something, but — I don't know — it just doesn't seem like a *difference of opinion regarding one's legislative agenda* is the most substantive attack when your rival is facing four criminal cases, dozens of felony charges, a civil fraud trial, [a defamation case](#) and questions over his [constitutional eligibility for reelection](#) due to all of his [insurrection-ing](#). I'm not a campaign operative, but it seems like maybe — *maybe* — there might be a better line of attack in there somewhere, you know?

Florida Gov. Ron Desantis does *not* know, or at least he does not want you to *know* that he knows. On Thursday, DeSantis spent an entire town hall meeting dancing around the issue, jabbing Trump over his opposition to a [six-week abortion ban](#) and his failure to [eliminate birthright citizenship](#) in his first term but sidestepping opportunities to nail him for [assaulting democracy](#), [paying off a porn star](#) to salvage his 2016 campaign, storing national secrets [in his spare](#)

[bathroom](#) or anything else that people might actually remember/care about, [the Florida Phoenix reported](#).

“What is he now telling people in Iowa this time around?” DeSantis mused about birthright citizenship, which I am specifying mostly because this is such a nonissue that I forgot about it between the last paragraph and this quote. “He says he’s going to do the same thing that he didn’t do the first four years. I mean, sometimes you can say Congress stymied you and all this other stuff, but all he had to do was put his John Hancock on a piece of paper, and he did not do it. When I tell you I’m going to do something, you can take it to the bank. I’m going to do it.”



*If his campaign were a facial expression.
(Photo by Scott Olson/Getty Images)*

This — the most boring rant in the history of ranting — was the harshest attack of the evening. Every other criticism came with an equal and opposite backpedal, like accusing Trump of flip-flopping on abortion and then insisting it wasn’t meant to question his “pro-life” bonafides. At one point, DeSantis said Jan. 6, 2021 was “not a good day for the country,” but then immediately blamed “the media” and “the left” for politicizing the riot.

The strategy here, if you can call it that, is to court Trump voters without alienating them, which is fine in theory but impossible to pull off in real life. Trump voters are weirdly loyal, especially in primary contests, which tend to be dominated by the farthest right reaches of the party. This is particularly true in Iowa, where a majority of [GOP caucusgoers](#) are evangelicals who backed Trump [in 2020](#). [Fifty-one percent](#) of them plan to caucus for him on Jan. 15, boosting him to an overall [32-point lead](#) over DeSantis with 10 days to go.

Barring a last-minute upset or a surge to a strong second-place finish, this is probably the end for DeSantis, who is unlikely to rebound in either [New Hampshire](#) or [South Carolina](#), where he trails both Trump *and* Nikki Haley by double digits. (And thus a weary nation will turn its eyes to Haley, but that is a topic for a future newsletter.)



"See you soon."

(Photo by Scott Olson/Getty Images)

If the election were today (IT IS NOT), Biden would be expected to lose, according to [polling](#). I want to be clear that this is a mostly meaningless hypothetical regardless of how many headlines it garners. Early polls — a year out, say — are far shakier than polls conducted closer to the actual contest, when swing voters and the Not Chronically Online crowd [get more engaged](#) in

politics. Polls also tend to focus on a narrow range of topics, which by definition means they are not accounting for a whole host of other topics. For example: Abortion, which has won support from voters – and for pro-abortion (Democratic) candidates — even in [deeply red states](#).

Among those is Ohio, where voters in November overwhelmingly approved an amendment enshrining the right to abortion in the state constitution. That contest came three months after an August special election where voters rejected a Republican-backed proposal that would have made it more difficult to amend the constitution. Turnout was strong in both contests, and there's every reason to think that momentum will continue through 2024, experts [told the Ohio Capital Journal](#).

"I think people are more than willing to speak out," said Jeff Rusnak, a political strategist who worked with medical providers on the proposed amendment campaign. "They've been given permission to do that and I think it makes voters feel like they're not alone."

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, a Democrat, has [already positioned himself](#) as the pro-abortion candidate in the 2024 election, where he'll face one of three anti-abortion Republicans. One of those is Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose, who [voted in favor](#) of a six-week abortion ban and masterminded the ([failed](#)) plot to [trick voters](#) into voting to make it harder for voters to amend the constitution.

The issue also gives progressive activists a blueprint for reshaping other contentious policies — and protecting democracy, Rusnak said.

"Getting it on the ballot is a little easier now, because we have the playbook, and redistricting is another example of one of those democracy issues," Rusnak said.



Speaking of democracy!
(Photo by Drew Angerer/Getty Images)

Defending democracy is more of a literal issue in Maryland's 3rd congressional district thanks to Harry Dunn, a former U.S. Capitol police officer who fought hand-to-hand with Jan. 6 rioters and a new Democratic primary candidate, [per Maryland Matters](#).

“On January 6th, 2021, I did my duty as a police officer and as an American and defended our nation’s Capitol from violent insurrectionists,” Dunn said in a statement. “Today, I’m running for Congress because the forces that spurred that violent attack are still at work and as a patriotic American, it is my duty to defend our democracy.”

Dunn, 40, is a Prince George’s County native and a political novice, albeit one with a fairly high profile, thanks to regular news appearances and his work with the Jan. 6 U.S. House committee. Last year, he received a Presidential Citizens Medal from Biden, the nation’s second-highest civilian award.

“I think it’s important to note that I accept this medal not as a Capitol Hill Police Officer, a job I have held for 15 years. Rather, I am here as an American,” Dunn said during the ceremony on Jan. 6, 2023. “What I did on Jan. 6, I did as a police

officer. It was my job. But what I have done every day since, I do because I am an American.”

Stripes and stars: [Fight for congressional majorities launches against backdrop of presidential campaigns](#) ... [With abortion on the 2024 ballot, campaigns could see millions in funding from familiar players](#) ... [Three Republicans vie for north Alabama Senate seat in Tuesday primary](#) ... [Iowa Republicans highlight results reporting system for Jan. 15 caucuses](#) ... [Kentucky Senate leader files bill to curb ‘divisive concepts’ in public higher education](#) ... [Behind 14th Amendment argument to disqualify Trump from Maine ballot: process, reasoning and the role of partisanship](#) ... [Bid launched to block Trump’s access to ballot in Massachusetts](#) ... [Hinds County ballot shortage renews calls for early voting in Mississippi](#) ... [U.S. Rep. Don Bacon \(R-Neb.\) likely to face a challenger on his right](#) ... [New Mexico lawmaker proposes taking away governor’s power to ‘pocket veto’](#) ... [No compromise in North Carolina elections lawsuits](#) ... [Ohio abortion rights amendment’s impacts will spread into 2024 campaigns](#) ... [Voting, disability rights advocates claim Ohio photo voter ID law violates federal disabilities law](#) ... [Oregon Republican delegates must back winner of May presidential primary, party says](#) ... [Washington legislature’s lead budget writers offer clues about what’s next for state spending](#) ... [Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers on his relationship with the Legislature, redistricting and priorities for 2024](#)



Caught Our Eye

I regret to inform you that No Labels, a political organization trying to make “unity ticket” happen, is now on the ballot in Maine after getting the all-clear Friday from Secretary of State Shenna Bellows, [per the Maine Morning Star](#). Nearly 9,500 Maine voters were enrolled members as of Jan. 2.



*“...And that is why the filibuster is my, and your, best friend.”
(Photo via the Maine Morning Star)*

Look, a third-party ticket is a nice idea that has zero chance of succeeding in our blatantly two-party system, unless your idea of success is “losing the election but not before siphoning votes away from another candidate, usually a Democrat.” Third-party candidates have contributed to [many super fun American times](#), such as *Bush v. Gore* ([Ralph Nader](#)) and President Donald Trump ([Jill Stein](#)), so conventional wisdom (and the reality of victory margins [in modern elections](#)) suggests they can (will?) also usher in Trump: The Sequel. (A blockbuster, coming to wreck a democracy near you this November!)

No Labels is the worst, is my point, and that’s before you factor in their [conservative megadonors](#) and likely candidate choices (former U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin, president of the [filibuster fan club](#) and a West Virginia Democrat; and former Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, who is mostly fine I guess). Unsurprisingly, U.S. Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) [is a fan](#), at least until they surprise her by helping Trump to a second term, at which point I’m sure she will be [Extremely Shocked](#) And [Disappointed](#). Or maybe not. After all, she’s [pretty sure](#) he’s “learned his lesson.”



From The Newsrooms

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SCOTUS

- [Price tag for new South Dakota prisons, already historic, could grow significantly](#)
- [December jobs report: Wages up, hiring steady as job market ends year strong](#)
- [U.S. Supreme Court to consider Louisiana corporal punishment case from autistic student](#)
- [Nebraska senators seek waiver, second chance at applying for summer food funds rejected by governor](#)



One Last Thing

White Lotus season 3 is coming, and it's bringing [Parker Posey](#). *excited screech*

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