

# News From The States

# EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

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I haven't really paid much attention to the presidential primary process, mostly because I'm pretty sure I already know how it will end. (I have seen this movie before, and I did not enjoy the jump-scares.) My engagement has mostly consisted of ogling the ever-widening gap between Donald Trump and Nikki Haley, which morphed from [a gulf](#) to [a ravine](#) to the [Grand Canyon](#), filled with MAGA hats. Theoretically, there's [plenty of time](#) for that to change. Realistically, it was over before it began.



## The Big Takeaway

**The march continued toward its inevitable conclusion Tuesday in Michigan,** where Trump notched a 42-point victory over Haley in the GOP primary, [the Michigan Advance reported](#). President Joe Biden roughly doubled that in the Democratic primary, scoring 81% of the vote in a win over [a protest campaign](#) that urged Democrats to mark “uncommitted” on their ballots to protest his unwillingness to call for a full cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war. The dual blowouts were the clearest sign yet that we're headed for a 2020 rematch. But the numbers offered other signs, too.



*Guess whoooooo!*  
*(Photos by Getty Images)*

**Namely, this: Voters are not psyched.** For now, our collective malaise appears to be a larger problem for Trump, who has maintained enough support among GOP primary voters to stay in first place but not enough to definitively oust Haley from the race. Trump had expected to win Michigan by a [much larger margin](#), but underperformed among college-educated voters and in suburban areas that flipped from red to blue in 2020, handing Biden the state’s electoral votes (and the presidency). Statewide, a solid third of GOP voters cast their ballots for someone other than the [legally embattled](#) frontrunner, which does not bode well in a key swing state, experts [told the Advance](#).

“The big story is not just that Donald Trump continues to lose either three or four out of every 10 Republican votes. It’s that those voters are never, ever, ever coming back to Donald Trump,” [said Jeff Timmer](#), former executive director of the Michigan Republican Party. “Chlamydia is more popular than Donald Trump among college-educated white voters, especially white women, and even non-college white mainstream protestant women.”



*Alas, Trump is coming back to them.  
(Photo by Joe Raedle/Getty Images)*

**There were warning signs for Biden, too.** About 100,000 primary voters participated in the “uncommitted” protest campaign, a highly publicized effort designed to draw attention to [deep dissatisfaction](#) among progressives and Arab-Americans over Biden’s handling of the conflict in Gaza. The so-called #AbandonBiden movement has said it will not support the president in November under any circumstances, but it’s not really clear what that means in Michigan, where Democratic primary voters often cast uncommitted ballots as a messaging tactic. Just 13% of Tuesday’s ballots were marked uncommitted, similar to the share [in the 2012 primary](#), when Biden and then-President Barack Obama ran unopposed. (They won the state by nearly 10 percentage points in November.) It’s likely that many will come back to Biden in the general election, particularly if he flips on the cease-fire (or if Trump is in jail, a [non-zero possibility](#)).

“Trump, not Biden, is the one with base problems,” said Adrian Hemond, a Democratic strategist in Lansing. “Trump continues to battle back the 25% or so of the Republican base that is repulsed by him. Overall a pretty uneventful night.”

**A different campaign is afoot in Congress as of Wednesday**, when Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) announced that he would step down from his leadership role in November, [our D.C. bureau reported](#). The decision marks the end of an unprecedented era in American politics as well as the beginning of a months-long fight to select a replacement that so far officially includes Sen. John Cornyn, a Texas Republican who [said Wednesday](#) he'd "made no secret" of his intention to seek the leadership role. Senators will select new leaders in November.



*Yep, that's McConnell.*  
(Photo by Drew Angerer/Getty Images)

McConnell, 82, is probably best known for refusing to consider Merrick Garland for a U.S. Supreme Court vacancy following [Justice Antonin Scalia's death](#) in February 2016 on the grounds that "the American people" deserved a "say" in "the court's direction" via the November presidential election. The unprecedented move handed Trump the first of three Supreme Court seats. The third was filled by Justice Amy Coney Barrett, who was confirmed by McConnell's Senate [less than two weeks](#) before the 2020 presidential election.

McConnell also played a key role in pulling the rest of the federal judiciary to the right via Senate confirmation of [234 lifetime appointments](#) to the bench. He is



both the longest-serving senator in Kentucky history and the longest-serving Senate leader in American history.

McConnell reflected on that career in a floor speech Wednesday, saying he'd relinquish his leadership role with a continued love of politics and a long-awaited feeling of "clarity and peace" over the actions he took to "preserve the ideals I so strongly believe." His decision came weeks after the death of his wife's younger sister, a difficult loss he said led to "introspection" about his future and the world he'd leave behind.

"One of life's most underappreciated talents is to know when it's time to move on to life's next chapter," McConnell said. "It's time for the next generation of leadership."



*McConnell with Cornyn, ostensibly the "next generation."  
(Photo by Graeme Sloan/Sipa USA via REUTERS)*

**Don't get it twisted, though** — this is an exit from Senate *leadership*, not from the Senate itself. McConnell's term does not expire until the beginning of 2027, and he said Wednesday he planned to stay at least until January, when the chamber's new leaders will take over.

“I’m not going anywhere anytime soon,” he said. “I still have enough gas in my tanks to disappoint my critics.”

**Former Ohio House Speaker Larry Householder this week continued disappointing ... everyone** by appealing his conviction — and 20-year prison sentence — for accepting a \$61 million bribe from a utility company in exchange for shepherding a \$1 billion bailout through the state legislature. His rationale? The bribe (which was not even a bribe) is protected by the First Amendment, [the Ohio Capital Journal reported](#).

The 105-page document, filed Monday evening in federal court, paints Householder as an innocent pawn “scapegoated” by the federal government over super legal campaign contributions (not bribes) donated by FirstEnergy Corp. to cement his power and elect other sympathetic lawmakers, pass the bailout bill, and stymie a ballot initiative to overturn it. Attorneys for Householder argued that prosecutors overstepped “the limits of their authority” to make an example out of Householder despite evidence showing that utility companies had simply “contributed campaign funds” to a legislator “who was known to be a supporter” of their cause.



*Campaign contributions are AOK.  
(Photo via the Ohio Capital Journal)*

“The federal government was not content to charge the then-Speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives, Appellant Larry Householder, with ordinary

honest-services bribery charges,” the attorneys wrote in the appeal. “Instead, it charged him with leading a racketeering enterprise and tried him as a scapegoat for what it viewed to be a corrupt piece of legislation supported by undisclosed campaign contributions that were permitted by federal law.”

The defense team also made a host of other arguments, ranging from procedural complaints (a juror was dismissed without the attorneys’ input!) to sentencing issues (the judge miscalculated the size of the non-bribe!). In one section, attorneys argued that the judge bungled the trial by failing to explain to the jury that bribery constitutes an “agreement” that demands “proof of an unambiguous quid pro quo,” which was not proven by the government. Another alleged bias on the part of the judge, whose two bids for the state Supreme Court were opposed by Householder.

“We all collectively believe that the court holds animosity toward us,” Householder’s attorney Mark Marein said during the proceedings. “I question whether [Judge Black] should be presiding over this.”

## Questions abound

- [House panel weakens bill limiting Indiana governor’s executive powers](#)
- [Power struggle shelves new Louisiana Supreme Court districts in Legislature](#)
- [Mississippi lawmakers move bill to eliminate 5-day period to count mailed ballots](#)
- [Tennessee Lt. Gov. Randy McNally says expulsion restriction bill could pose problems](#)
- [Utah Legislature seals elected officials’ work calendars](#)



## Also Trending

Extreme weather in Providence, Rhode Island could be mitigated by planting some trees. Say, 30,000 of them.

“In Rhode Island, in particular, we know that we’re seeing more and more extreme high-heat days and more intense rainstorm events,” Cassie Tharinger, a member of the steering committee for PVD Tree Plan, [told the Rhode Island Current](#). “That all leads to surface flooding and to really high-heat situations that impact people who are already vulnerable for all sorts of health reasons.”





*Flooding in Providence in January.  
(Photo by Alexander Castro/Rhode Island Current)*

**Areas with sparse tree coverage** overlap with high rental rates, low median household incomes, higher concentrations of people of color, and high asthma rates, said Tharinger, who serves as executive director of the Providence Neighborhood Planting Program, a community partnership program founded 30 years ago to create a more robust and equitable urban forest in the city of Providence.

Studies have found that trees slow down precipitation from reaching the ground and intercept stormwater runoff. As a result, cities with denser greenery can weather storms better than others.

Adding 30,000 trees in Providence, members say, would remove over 38,000 pounds of pollution from the air and prevent 10.4 million gallons of polluted stormwater from entering waterways, according to the tree plan. The proposal, developed by a coalition of arborists and conservationists, aims to mitigate the effects of climate change, as well as improve public health and quality of life



across the city.

“It’s a moment where green infrastructure and kind of nature-based solutions ... are just one of the tools that we most need to deploy to make our cities more [able] to adapt today to these conditions,” Tharinger said.

## Green scene

- [Nevada electricity, natural gas bills expected to fall in April](#)
- [Oregon lawmakers poised to keep limit on canola production amid deadlock](#)
- [Connecting the dots between Tennessee’s home builders and bill to deregulate construction on wetlands](#)



## From The Newsrooms

### Criminal Justice

- [Animal abuse registry pitched in New Hampshire as ‘needed tool’; critics fear unintended impacts](#)
- [Racial Justice Act hearing expert: Race is a factor in prosecutors’ decision to strike jurors in North Carolina](#)
- [Texas set to execute Ivan Cantu for Dallas murders as doubts of his guilt persist](#)
- [Why the Wisconsin Legislature is unlikely to create a task force on missing and murdered Black women & girls](#)

### Education

- [Transparency bills seek to reveal the true costs of college](#)
- [Alabama House passes school voucher-like program](#)
- [Reading bill clears Indiana House; controversial tenure bill also approved](#)
- [Ohio University pauses race-based scholarships after Supreme Court ruling, Attorney General advice](#)

### Health care

- [Telehealth abortions on the rise since Dobbs, new report shows](#)
- [Who's not discussing the Alabama IVF ruling? State judicial candidates.](#)
- [Pharmacists in Nevada will soon be able to prescribe opioid addiction medication](#)
- [Medicaid work requirement question will appear on South Dakota ballots in November](#)



## One Last Thing



*Oinker.*

*(Photo by Greg LaRose/Louisiana Illuminator)*

A piglet who was [tossed like a football](#) during a Mardi Gras parade will live out the rest of his days on a farm after receiving a pardon Wednesday by Louisiana Lt. Gov. Billy Nungesser, [the Louisiana Illuminator reported](#).

He also got a new name: Earl Piglet Long.

“I ran to be a voice for everybody, even the least of us,” said state Rep. Lauren Ventrella, who owns the farm (and now, I suppose, also the piglet). “As a Republican up here, sometimes we like to cut the pork. But I will tell you this is

the pork we won't be cutting.”

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