



DEMOCRACY REFORM TASK FORCE WEEKLY NEWS ROUND UP

DECEMBER 8, 2017

NATIONAL NEWS

[Tax Plan Crowns a Big Winner: Trump's Industry](#)

The New York Times

Perhaps the biggest winner is the industry where President Trump and his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, made their millions: commercial real estate. House and Senate Republicans, in their divergent bills, both offered steeply reduced rates to corporate giants, partnerships and family-owned firms across the board. But when it came time to eliminate special breaks or impose tighter standards, real estate was generally excused from the room.... Most businesses were hit with new limits on deductions for interest payments, but not real estate. Most industries lost the ability to defer taxes on the exchange of similar kinds of property, but not real estate. Domestic manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies lost some industry-specific breaks in exchange for lower rates.... The real estate industry ended up with an even more generous depreciation timetable, allowing owners to shelter more income.... And in a break from previous practice, rental and mortgage-interest income qualifies for a lower tax rate, the kind of special treatment traditionally reserved for long-term capital gains and certain qualified dividends.

**Related Story: [Special Giveaways in Tax Bill Benefit Family Members, Colleagues of GOP Senators](#).*

**Related Story: [McCaskill: Lobbyists Gave Dems a List of GOP Amendments to Tax Bill](#).*

**Related Story: [Tax Bill May Offer Way to Funnel Political Cash and Make It Deductible](#).*

**Related Story: [The Tax Overhaul Is Proof that Money in Politics Affects All of Us](#).*

[Trump Gives Donors Tax Cuts, Then Asks Them for Campaign Donations](#)

Newsweek

President Donald Trump arrived in New York to meet with potential donors for his 2020 re-election campaign, donors who are expecting to gain substantially from the Trump administration's tax overhaul bill that was passed by the Senate in the early hours of Saturday

morning. Trump will spend his one-day trip in the city meeting with potential donors leading fundraising events and attending a discussion with Republican National Committee supporters to discuss his 2020 campaign. He plans to raise around \$6 million while in New York, from donors who will attend his "Christmas Breakfast with President Trump," with tickets ranging from \$1,000 per individual to \$50,000 for a VIP table for 10. Those donors stand to gain from the Trump-backed tax bill that was passed by a vote of 51-49 after a last-minute rewrite that gave senators very little time to review what they were voting on.

[Trump Pick to Head Consumer Safety Board Is Too Close to Industries](#)

The New York Times

Ann Marie Buerkle, a commissioner at the federal agency charged with protecting consumers from hazardous toys and products, has seldom voted for a mandatory recall, a maximum fine or a tougher safety standard. In more than four years on the Consumer Product Safety Commission, Ms. Buerkle has opposed limiting dangerous carbon monoxide emissions in portable generators; resisted requiring safety technology on table saws; and disagreed with the other Republican commissioner on the five-member board by rejecting fines against companies that delayed reporting hazards to the agency, as required by law. As President Trump's nominee to head the agency, she is drawing criticism for her positions.

[A Former Panama Agent Is Guiding Trump's Homeland Security Pick](#)

The Center for Public Integrity

A private consultant shepherding President Donald Trump's Department of Homeland Security secretary nominee Kirstjen Nielsen through her U.S. Senate confirmation process has also lobbied the homeland security agency on behalf of the Panamanian government. Thad Bingel, who is guiding Nielsen through the confirmation process, worked as a registered foreign agent representing Panama's interests to the Department of Homeland Security from February 2012 to the end of 2013, according to federal records reviewed by the Center for Public Integrity.

[Bob Murray Had Early Access to Rick Perry to Share Coal Plan](#)

POLITICO

Coal magnate Bob Murray pitched Energy Secretary Rick Perry on his plan to throw an economic lifeline to coal companies less than a month before Perry set in motion plans to aid the industry, according to newly disclosed photographs that show the two meeting. The liberal magazine *In These Times* obtained pictures of Murray and Perry from a March 29 meeting at Energy Department headquarters, less than a month after Perry was sworn in. Several other officials were in attendance, including Andrew Wheeler, who at the time was a lobbyist for Murray and has since been nominated as the Environmental Protection Agency's No. 2 official.

The meeting puts Murray and Perry together at a crucial moment in the timeline of the Trump administration's push to save the struggling coal industry, an effort that would benefit Murray Energy in particular while raising electricity prices for potentially millions of people.

[Swalwell: It's No Hoax, Russia Really Did Interfere in Our Election](#) [Video]

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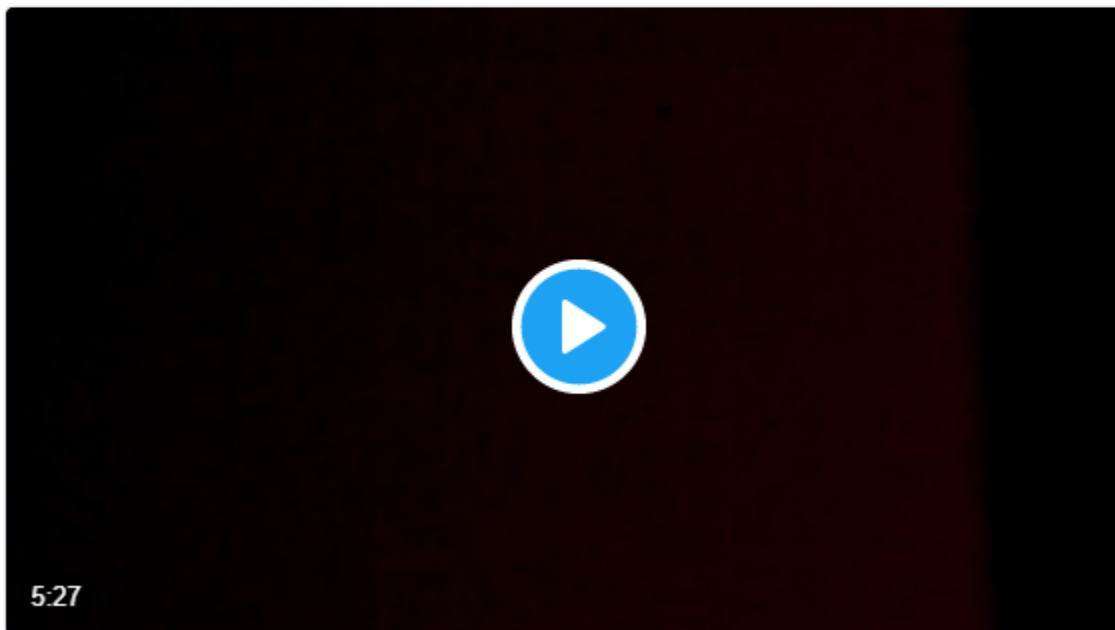
Rep. Eric Swalwell ✓

@RepSwalwell

Following



It's no hoax - Russia really did interfere with our election, and we're still investigating the Trump campaign's role. Let us break it down for you:



8:33 AM - 8 Dec 2017

[Prospects Brightening for Redistricting Reform](#)

The American Prospect

Republicans had stunning success after the 2010 Tea Party wave election tilting the rules of our election processes in their favor. One major part of that was extreme gerrymandering after the 2010 Census, taking advantage of increased Republican control of state legislatures elected in

2010. The lopsided congressional and legislative delegations have led many analysts to wonder whether even a blue “wave election” could flip enough seats for Democrats to take control of either house of Congress or very many state legislatures. But there are a number of reasons to think that the times may be changing. The Virginia off-year election showed both the challenge and the possibilities. Democrats picked up all statewide offices, and won roughly 224,000 more votes than Republicans in state legislative races. Extensive gerrymandering has almost certainly left the Republicans with narrow control of the House of Delegates; with anything close to fair districting, Democrats would have won a clear majority of seats. However, it also showed that major election victories can be ground-shifting even with severely gerrymandered districts.

IN THE STATES

[Seattle Residents Spent \\$1.14 Million in ‘Democracy Vouchers’](#)

The Seattle Times

Seattle residents spent \$1.14 million in “democracy vouchers” as the city launched its first-in-the-country program this year, according to newly released data. That’s much less than the \$3 million a year in property taxes the city began collecting in 2016 to pay for the vouchers program, which allows voters to contribute to qualifying political candidates using public money. The last day to donate vouchers was Nov. 30. Residents likely would have spent much more taxpayer money had the vouchers been allowed in the mayoral race. August’s mayoral primary attracted 21 candidates, while November’s runoff saw Jenny Durkan and Cary Moon battle over votes. But the vouchers program this time included only races for Seattle City Council and city attorney, because of a clause in the 2015 ballot measure that authorized the program.

[Candidates for Connecticut Governor Commit to Public Financing](#)

The CT Mirror

Connecticut’s political left obtained commitments from four Democratic gubernatorial contenders on a range of progressive issues Saturday at a “People’s Symposium” that was as much a test of the audience’s appetite for hitting the streets to resist President Donald J. Trump as the politicians’ visions for succeeding Gov. Dannel P. Malloy...Moreno said the Democratic candidates invited all met two criteria: They had demonstrated significant support by raising at least \$50,000, and they were committed to maintaining Connecticut’s program of public financing of campaigns. Sean Connolly, the former veterans’ affairs commissioner, is exploring a run for governor, but his first campaign financing report will not be filed until January.

State Lawmakers Blur Line Between the Public's Business And their Own

The Center for Public Integrity

State lawmakers around the country have introduced and supported policies that directly and indirectly help their own businesses, their employers and sometimes their personal finances, according to an analysis of disclosure forms and legislative votes.... The Center for Public Integrity and The Associated Press found numerous examples in which lawmakers' votes had the effect of promoting their private interests. Even then, the votes did not necessarily represent a conflict of interest as defined by the state. That's because legislatures set their own rules for when lawmakers should recuse themselves. In some states, lawmakers are required to vote despite any ethical dilemmas.... Many lawmakers defend even the votes that benefit their businesses or industries, saying they bring important expertise to the debate.

KEY OPINION

Keep Charities Charitable

U.S. News (Op-Ed)

In the dead of night over the weekend – 1:36 a.m. on Saturday, to be exact – the United States Senate passed its version of "tax reform," teeing up a conference with the House of Representatives to iron out differences between each chamber's bill. The bills are not an overhaul of our byzantine tax code but a giveaway to the 1 percent. They are littered with special interest giveaways that have been pushed by big donors. One contentious issue among many is a repeal of a section of the tax law called the Johnson Amendment, which could do lasting damage to our democracy. For more than 60 years, the provision has protected charities and religious institutions from becoming tools of partisan political operatives. Repeal language was absent from the Senate version of the \$1.5 trillion tax bill. Members of the House, however, bowed to pressure from the religious right and included it in their bill. The religious right has long made campaign finance deregulation a pillar of its agenda.

**Related Op-Ed: [Congress Could Hardwire Dark Money Into Our Democracy.](#)*

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