



DEMOCRACY REFORM TASK FORCE WEEKLY NEWS ROUND UP

April 27, 2018

NATIONAL NEWS

[Pro-Trump Groups Spending Big at Trump Properties](#)

POLITICO

Political groups supporting President Donald Trump are doubling as big-spending customers for the business empire he has not divested from. Trump's reelection campaign has spent \$670,000 at Trump properties since he was elected president, and \$125,000 during the first three months of this year alone, recent disclosures show. But Trump's campaign is not the only group paying Trump's companies for events, catering and sometimes even rent: The Republican National Committee has also paid \$1.1 million to Trump properties since the election. Outside PACs supporting Trump and Vice President Mike Pence have also been two of the biggest political spenders at Trump properties during that time. Because Trump has maintained his financial interest in his vast business while president — and, unlike previous presidents, filed for reelection soon after taking office — the relationship between pro-Trump political groups and the Trump businesses has no precedent. While congressional campaigns for Republican lawmakers have also spent money at Trump properties, much of the spending at Trump properties from outside political groups appears to come from those linked to Trump.

[Democrats Look to Successful 2006 Messaging in Bid to Retake House](#)

The Huffington Post

Democrats are looking back to the last time they took control of the House for lessons on what may work this year, and they're starting to narrow in on a major theme: the Republican "culture of corruption, cronyism and incompetence." In 2006, Democrats won majorities in both the House and Senate, breaking the hold Republicans had on Congress for more than a decade.... House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) is bringing back her 2006 refrain for this cycle. It first appeared in an April 6 statement calling for the resignation of Environmental Protection Agency head Scott Pruitt, saying he was "a part of the Trump Administration's culture of corruption,

cronyism and incompetence.” It then popped up later that day in one of her press releases, and then three days later in a letter to her colleagues about their priorities in the coming months. Other Democrats say that the message has been talked about in strategy meetings as something they want to do more of. The targets in Congress aren’t as obvious as they were last time, with many of the men who were caught up in recent sexual harassment scandals quickly resigning on their own. But there’s plenty of material for them to work with in the Trump administration, including abuses that the Republican leadership in Congress has been unwilling to speak up against. Also expect Democrats to go after Republicans for how they, or their corporate donors, benefitted from the tax cut law.

[Trump in Palm Beach: Sheriff's OT Bill for Feds \\$3.3 Million and Growing](#)

Palm Beach Post

Palm Beach County Sheriff’s deputies who help protect President Donald Trump when he visits Mar-a-Lago racked up nearly \$3.3 million in overtime during presidential trips between November and early February – money that county officials expect to get back from the federal government. Congress set aside \$41 million in March to reimburse local law enforcement agencies for “extraordinary...personnel costs” incurred through Sept. 30 “for protection activities directly and demonstrably associated with any residence of the President that is designated or identified to be secured by the United States Secret Service.”

[Rosenstein Battles to Protect Mueller, His Tactics Could Cost the DOJ](#)

The New York Times

Amid sustained criticism by President Trump and rumors that he will be fired, Mr. Rosenstein is also maneuvering to defuse demands by Republicans in Congress that Democrats say are aimed at ousting him from his job — and from his role as protector of the special counsel, Robert S. Mueller III. So far, he appears to be succeeding. But in trying to deflect those attacks, some say, Mr. Rosenstein has risked eroding the Justice Department’s historic independence from political meddling. The consequences could persist long after he and the rest of the Trump administration are out of power. A small but influential group of House Republicans has demanded greater access to sensitive documents related to some of the F.B.I.’s most politically charged investigations into the Trump campaign and Hillary Clinton’s handling of classified emails. Should Mr. Rosenstein fail to comply, they have threatened to subpoena him, hold him in contempt of Congress or even impeach him.

[House Intelligence GOP Clear Trump Campaign in Russian Meddling](#)

The New York Times

Republicans on the House Intelligence Committee found no evidence during a monthslong investigation that the Trump campaign aided Russia's election meddling, the lawmakers concluded in a 250-page report released on Friday that assails President Trump's political rivals and criticizes the F.B.I. and the intelligence community for their responses to Moscow's interference. In their own dissenting views, Democrats on the committee accused the Republicans of prematurely closing the investigation out of a desire to protect Mr. Trump and asserted that eagerness by Trump campaign associates to accept offers of Russian assistance suggest "a consciousness of wrongfulness, if not illegality." The strikingly divergent conclusions closed a chapter for a congressional committee that, while charged with oversight of American spy agencies, has fractured into warring factions that often seemed to see the advancement of political agendas as their primary mission.

[Pruitt Admits Little, Mostly Blames Aides and Staff](#)

The Washington Post

Scott Pruitt gave little ground Thursday as he testified before two House panels about controversial spending and management decisions he has made while at the helm of the Environmental Protection Agency, blaming aides for exorbitant spending and saying career officials signed off on other controversial decisions. Bolstered by Republican lawmakers, who praised his push to unravel Obama-era regulations and cut the agency's workforce, Pruitt suggested that the censure he's faced in recent months stems largely from opponents who want to stall President Trump's environmental policies.

**Related Story: [Pruitt Support in Senate Erodes as GOP Lawmakers Seek Hearings.](#)*

**Related Story: [Pruitt Met with Lobbyist Whose Wife Rented Him a \\$50-a-Night Condo.](#)*

**Related Story: [Scott Pruitt's Political Patron Now Questions the EPA Chief's Ethics.](#)*

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**Related Story: [Scott Pruitt Before the EPA: Fancy Homes, A Shell Company and Friends with Money.](#)*

[Mulvaney Advises Bankers on Ways to Curtail Agency](#)

The New York Times

Mick Mulvaney, the interim director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, told banking industry executives on Tuesday that they should press lawmakers hard to pursue their agenda, and revealed that, as a congressman, he would meet only with lobbyists if they had contributed to his campaign. "We had a hierarchy in my office in Congress," Mr. Mulvaney, a former Republican lawmaker from South Carolina, told 1,300 bankers and lending industry officials at an American Bankers Association conference in Washington. "If you're a lobbyist who never gave us money, I didn't talk to you. If you're a lobbyist who gave us money, I might talk to you." At the

top of the hierarchy were his constituents. “If you came from back home and sat in my lobby, I talked to you without exception, regardless of contributions,” he said, who received nearly \$63,000 from payday lenders for his congressional campaigns.

**Related Story: [Mick Mulvaney Met With Lobbyist Donors While at Trump White House.](#)*

**Related Story: [Which Lobbyist-Connected PACs Gave to Mick Mulvaney.](#)*

**Related Story: [Mulvaney Backlash May Drive Political Money Changes.](#)*

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[Sen. Kamala Harris Spurns Corporate PAC Donations](#)

The Washington Post

Sen. Kamala D. Harris (D-Calif.) said Monday that she will no longer accept donations from corporate political action committees, a shift in her public position from just a few weeks ago. With Harris’s new stance, announced during a radio interview, she joins a handful of other progressive Democratic senators who are also considered possible 2020 presidential candidates in pledging not to take PAC money. “Money has now really tipped the balance between an individual having equal power in an election to a corporation,” Harris said on the New York radio show “The Breakfast Club.” She cited the impact of the Citizens United case, decided by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2010.... Others in the Senate who have made similar pledges not to take corporate PAC money include Sens. Cory Booker (D-N.J.), Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) and Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.).

[West Virginia Candidate Lives Near Vegas, Mulled Chinese Citizenship](#)

The New York Times

Mr. Blankenship offers no apology for his many contradictions and personal and business decisions, some of them previously undisclosed. Though he lives a baronial lifestyle thanks to a fortune built on coal scratched from West Virginia’s mountains, he says the size and origins of his wealth are no one’s business. He is the only candidate in either party in the Senate race who has not disclosed his personal finances as required by law to the Senate Select Committee on Ethics. There isn’t “much of a penalty” for flouting the law, he explained in an interview. “I don’t personally think anybody should have to disclose private information,” he said while awaiting the start of a “meet the candidates” event last week in Cabin Creek, W.Va.

[House Dems: Facebook 'Embeds' Could Break Campaign Finance Law](#)

POLITICO

John Sarbanes of Maryland, Jerry Nadler of New York and Elijah Cummings of Maryland say Facebook's contribution of expertise to campaigns, to advise them on how best to use its platform, may create a too-cozy relationship between the company and lawmakers who might one day regulate it. The congressmen, in a letter Wednesday, ask Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg a series of questions about how the company manages its so-called embed operation.... "Once the assistance they're offering or the support they're offering gets creative past a certain baseline of services, then you're wandering into dangerous territory," Sarbanes told POLITICO.... Sarbanes said he wonders if Zuckerberg has a firm grasp of what his employees are doing out in the field in the final stretches of often heated campaigns. "You put some support person in a campaign office down South somewhere, and they're sitting next to a campaign operative, and you're getting into the last six weeks of a campaign, who knows what's going on?" he said. "So we're saying to them, 'Tell us what what's going on.'"

[America Continues to Ignore the Risks of Election Hacking](#)

The New Yorker

America's voting systems are hackable in all kinds of ways. As a case in point, in 2016, the Election Assistance Commission, the bipartisan federal agency that certifies the integrity of voting machines, and that will now be tasked with administering Congress's three hundred and eighty million dollars, was itself hacked. The stolen data—log-in credentials of E.A.C. staff members—were discovered, by chance, by employees of the cybersecurity firm Recorded Future, whose computers one night happened upon an informal auction of the stolen passwords. "This guy—we randomly called him Rasputin—was in a high-profile forum in the darkest of the darkest of the darkest corner of the dark Web, where hackers and reverse engineers, ninety-nine per cent of them Russian, hang out," Christopher Ahlberg, the C.E.O. of Recorded Future, told me. "There was someone from another country in the forum who implied he had a government background, and he wanted to get his hands on this stuff. That's when we decided we would just buy it. So we did, and took it to the government"—the U.S. government—"and the sale ended up being thwarted."

[Democratic Mendez 'Severely Admonished' by Ethics Committee](#)

The Washington Post

The Senate Ethics Committee said Thursday that Democratic Sen. Robert Menendez, who avoided conviction in a federal corruption trial last year, violated federal law and Senate rules in accepting unreported gifts from a friend and political ally. In a four-page "letter of admonition," the panel's three Republicans and three Democrats ordered Menendez to pay back the gifts he received from Salomon Melgen, a Florida eye doctor, and said he is "hereby severely admonished." "Your assistance to Dr. Melgen under these circumstances demonstrated poor

judgment, and it risked undermining the public's confidence in the Senate," the letter reads. "As such, your actions reflected discredit upon the Senate."

[Supreme Court Weights If Texas Voting Maps Discriminate Minorities](#)

The New York Times

The Supreme Court heard arguments on Tuesday in a long-running dispute over congressional and state legislative districts in Texas. The case was the court's third voting-rights case of the term. The two earlier ones, from Wisconsin and Maryland, concerned claims of partisan gerrymandering, where the political party in power draws maps to give its candidates an advantage. The Supreme Court has never struck down a voting district as a partisan gerrymander. Tuesday's argument concerned a more established legal theory, with the challengers arguing that Texas lawmakers had violated the Constitution and the Voting Rights Act by making it harder for minority voters to elect their preferred candidates.

[Will This Case Bring 'Dark Money' Into the Light?](#)

Newsweek

Independent watchdog group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) filed a lawsuit on Monday in an attempt to force the American Action Network (AAN), a conservative non-profit, to reveal its donors. Campaign finance experts say the lawsuit is unprecedented: It represents the first time an independent group has gone around FEC to sue over violations of campaign finance law, and opens a new avenue for activists to try and expose secret spending in American elections. And it's only happening because a federal judge ruled that the authority tasked with upholding U.S. election law isn't up to the job.

[After Parkland Shooting, NRA Biggest Fundraising Haul in 20 Years](#)

The Washington Post

The National Rifle Association's Political Victory Fund raised \$2.4 million in donations in March, setting a 21st-century record for the group in the month after a gunman killed 17 students and educators at a high school in Parkland, Fla. The unprecedented haul came as gun-control advocates, led by student survivors of the shooting, saw legislative victories in a number of states and marched on the U.S. Capitol to demand change at the federal level. The data from the Federal Election Commission show that \$1.9 million of the \$2.4 million total, about 80 percent of it, came from small donations of \$200 or less, which was in line with the small-dollar share of previous months' fundraising totals. A Chicago Tribune investigation found that the NRA aggressively stepped up its digital advertising in the wake of the Parkland shooting after survivors made opposition to the gun-rights group a centerpiece of their advocacy. The NRA has

also launched a campaign to add 100,000 new members in 100 days, saying that “the threat to our Second Amendment has never been greater.”

[New Scorecard Charts Congress on Pro-Democracy Bills](#)

Wisconsin Gazette

Common Cause is tracking the positions of every member of Congress on issues vital to the health of democracy. CC sent members of the House and Senate letters asking them to co-sponsor and support more than a dozen democracy reform bills and informing them that their co-sponsorship record will be published during the lead-up to Election Day in Common Cause’s “Democracy Scorecard.” In the wake of revelations of Russian attacks on the 2016 election, the tracked bills include legislation to safeguard the Special Counsel’s Russian Investigation and a bill requiring disclosure of online political advertisements.

KEY OPINION

[Mick Mulvaney Personifies Pay-to-Play](#)

The Washington Post (Editorial)

The depth of cynicism expressed by former South Carolina congressman Mick Mulvaney is breathtaking. Mr. Mulvaney, now director of the Office of Management and Budget, as well as interim head of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, told a group of bankers on Tuesday that he had a specific litmus test for lobbyists who wanted to see him while he served in the House, from 2011 to 2017. The rule was: He would not meet those who did not make campaign contributions to him, and he might meet those who did. Mr. Mulvaney appears to feel no shame about it.... Should Mr. Mulvaney be praised for exposing a dirty secret? We don’t think so. His comments seem to normalize quid pro quo behavior.... If Mr. Mulvaney’s comments have any larger lesson, it is not that everyone does it, but that Congress ought to face up to a challenge of campaign finance reform it has long neglected. At the very least, Congress should eliminate the loopholes that allow rivers of campaign cash to flow as dark money, the origins secret from the public. They could call it the Mick Mulvaney Open Door Act.

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