



DEMOCRACY REFORM TASK FORCE WEEKLY NEWS ROUND UP

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NATIONAL NEWS

[Pelosi Seizes on Anti-Corruption Message Against GOP](#)

The Hill

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (Calif.) is moving full steam ahead on a Democratic strategy to paint the GOP as corrupt ahead of the midterm elections, a case that got new legs after the arrest of Rep. Chris Collins (R-N.Y.) on insider trading charges last week.... “There’s something poetic about the fact that he was making these insider trading calls from the White House picnic,” said Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), who has been spearheading Democrats’ anti-corruption efforts with Rep. Cheri Bustos (D-Ill.). “In a sense, he sort of wandered into an ethics-free zone, and he couldn’t help himself. That’s the way this White House has operated.” ... As chairman of the Democracy Reform Task Force, Sarbanes has kept tabs on the Trump administration’s potential ethics violations, highlighted how special interests are influencing politics in Washington and developed Democratic proposals for reform.... Now, after fine-tuning the message for over a year, it’s ready to be deployed on the campaign trail.... “The Democrats, through the Democracy Reform Task Force, have really positioned our caucus well, and our candidates in the field well, to push the anti-corruption framework to say we stand against a rigged system,” Sarbanes said. “We wanted to assemble a robust effort on that front.”

**Related Story: [A Congressman, a Financial Deal with an Intricate Web of Conflicts.](#)*

[Voters Sick of Money in Politics a New Pitch: No PAC Money Accepted](#)

The New York Times

Campaign finance was once famously dismissed by Mitch McConnell, the Senate majority leader, as being of no greater concern to American voters than “static cling.” But since the Supreme Court’s Citizens United decision in 2010 opened the floodgates for unrestricted political spending, polls have shown that voters are growing increasingly bitter about the role of money in politics. The issue is now emerging in midterm races around the country, with dozens of Democrats rejecting donations from political action committees, or PACs, that are sponsored by corporations or industry groups.... Rather than dooming the campaigns, these pledges to reject PAC money have become central selling points for voters.

[The Fight for Purity in Michigan and the Democratic Party](#)

The New Yorker

Purity in politics can be hard to prove. It has grown even harder in the past decade, as new state and federal campaign-finance laws have helped to conceal many donors, and Michigan presents an especially dramatic case. As Craig Mauger, the executive director of the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, a nonprofit organization that tracks money in campaigns, told me, the state is “pretty notorious for the amount of dark money that pours into our races.” In 2015, the Center for Public Integrity ranked it fiftieth out of fifty states for transparency and accountability in state government. Many of the candidates running in Sanders’s wake in Democratic primaries across the country have distinguished themselves by their refusal to take donations from corporate political-action committees, and their attacks on opponents who do. But, because so many campaign donors are only partly visible, the charge of corporate influence, once raised, can be hard to prove or disprove — it just hangs there, like a stench.

[Trump's Lawyers Prepare to Fight Subpoena to Way to Supreme Court](#)

The Washington Post

Rudolph W. Giuliani, President Trump’s lead lawyer for the ongoing Russia probe, said Wednesday that he is still awaiting a response from special counsel Robert S. Mueller III to the Trump team’s latest terms for a presidential interview, which were made last week in a letter that argued against Trump’s having to answer questions about his possible obstruction of justice. In the meantime, Trump’s lawyers are preparing to oppose a potential subpoena from Mueller for a Trump sit-down by drafting a rebuttal that could set off a dramatic fight in federal courts.... White House officials have privately said Flood has cautioned Trump and others about the unpredictability of a subpoena fight that could be decided by the Supreme Court. Such a case would be unprecedented. Independent counsel Kenneth W. Starr served President Bill Clinton with a subpoena to compel him to appear before a grand jury, but it was withdrawn after Clinton agreed to testify.

[2014, Political Spending at Trump Properties \\$35K, 2018 It's \\$3.5M](#)

McClatchy DC Bureau

At least 125 Republican campaigns and conservative political groups spent more than \$3.5 million at President Donald Trump’s resorts, hotels and restaurants since January 2017, the month he was sworn in, according to an analysis by McClatchy. The money paid for catering for a fundraiser at the Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Fla. , a night’s stay at Trump’s golf club in Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif., and many meals at Trump International Hotel in Washington through June 30, according to the most recent information provided to the Federal Election Commission. The list includes Trump supporters like House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California, Rep. Roger Williams of Texas and Rep. Mark Meadows of North Carolina, chairman of the Freedom Caucus, a group of influential conservative members.

[Trump Is Aggressive in His Use of Nondisclosure Agreements](#)

The Washington Post

Dozens of White House aides have signed NDAs in exchange for working for Trump, who has long relied on such agreements in his business career, according to current and former administration employees. But NDAs have not been widely used by past administrations outside the transition time between presidents, in part because most legal experts believe such agreements are not legally enforceable for public employees. Copies of Trump NDAs obtained by The Washington Post or described by current and former aides lay out breathtakingly broad prohibitions on behavior and appear to be drawn heavily from similar contracts used in the past by the Trump Organization, the president's family firm. Under one agreement from the 2016 campaign, signers promised not to "demean or disparage publicly" Trump, his company or any member of his family — and also not to assist any other politician.

[Trump Offers White House Staffers a Special Perk at His Golf Club](#)

POLITICO

There's an under-the-radar perk being offered to staffers in President Donald Trump's administration — discounts on Trump-branded merchandise sold at his Bedminster, New Jersey, golf club. White House staffers who have a Secret Service hard pin identifying them as administration officials can flash it at the pro shop — where Trump-branded driver headcovers retail for \$40 and a Trump golf polo tee sells for \$90, according to the online Trump store — and receive the same discount available to club members, who pay a reported \$350,000 to join the club. Those discounts range from 15 percent off of any merchandise sold in the store, to 70 percent off clearance items, according to two staffers and a receipt reviewed by POLITICO. The practice is the latest indication that being a public servant in this administration comes with special perks to sweeten the deal. The discounts available at the Bedminster club were originally pitched by the president's daughter Ivanka Trump and the president himself as a nice gesture to aides, according to the recollection of someone familiar with the setup.

[Treasury Retweets Trump, Possibly Violating Campaign Law](#)

The Hill

The Treasury Department on Wednesday retweeted a post from President Trump celebrating Republican wins in congressional elections this year, potentially violating federal campaign law. The department's official Twitter account shared a tweet from Trump touting results from elections held Tuesday night and an upcoming "Red Wave!" of GOP congressional victors. "Great Republican election results last night. So far we have the team we want. 8 for 9 in Special Elections. Red Wave!," Trump tweeted at 8:30 a.m. this morning. Treasury deleted the retweet soon after media outlets raised questions about its legality.

[Legal Watchdog Wants Commerce IG to Investigate Wilbur Ross](#)

CNN

A government watchdog group is calling for the Commerce Department's inspector general to investigate whether Secretary Wilbur Ross violated criminal conflict of interest laws, in a detailed, more than 100-page report it filed with the IG Monday and was obtained by CNN.

In the extensive report supporting its request the Campaign Legal Center also claims the Secretary may have made false statements and omissions on a government form. While the allegations aren't new, CLC is calling on the inspector general to investigate whether Ross acted knowingly when he allegedly violated the law. The report may provide a road map for how to analyze whether a government official might have violated the criminal conflict of interest law but it's unclear how the IG will treat CLC's request.

[Voting Rights Advocates Once Had Ally in Government. That's Changing.](#)

The New York Times

A new voter ID law could shut out many Native Americans from the polls in North Dakota. A strict rule on the collection of absentee ballots in Arizona is being challenged as a form of voter suppression. And officials in Georgia are scrubbing voters from registration rolls if their details do not exactly match other records, a practice that voting rights groups say unfairly targets minority voters. During the Obama administration, the Justice Department would often go to court to stop states from taking steps like those. But 18 months into President Trump's term, there are signs of change: The department has launched no new efforts to roll back state restrictions on the ability to vote, and instead often sides with them. Under Attorney General Jeff Sessions, the department has filed legal briefs in support of states that are resisting court orders to rein in voter ID requirements, stop aggressive purges of voter rolls and redraw political boundaries that have unfairly diluted minority voting power.

IN THE STATES

[Commission Refuses to Put Public Campaign Financing Proposal on Ballot](#)

KRWG

The Bernalillo County Commission voted last night not to put a public financing proposal on the November ballot. The vote was 3-2. Almost 28,000 Albuquerque voters signed petitions to put the measure on the ballot, to fix a city public financing statute that was hobbled by a U.S. Supreme Court decision back in 2011....

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