



DEMOCRACY REFORM TASK FORCE WEEKLY NEWS ROUND UP

August 31, 2018

NATIONAL NEWS

[Dems Reject Corporate PACs, Rally Around Anti-Corruption Message](#)

POLITICO

Democrats have refined a plank of their anti-corruption messaging this cycle: We won't accept corporate PAC money.... This is a message that Democrats have picked up on across the country. End Citizens United ... tallied 111 Democratic candidates who have rejected corporate PACs who have advanced to the general election. The group said that about 60 percent of DCCC "Red to Blue" candidates have also pledged to reject corporate PACs. From Ohio's 1st District ("I'm Aftab Pureval, I won't take their corporate PAC money") to the Texas Senate race ("No PACs, just people," from Democratic Rep. Beto O'Rourke) and just about everywhere in between, Democrats have used their rejection of corporate PAC money as part of positive messaging to say they'll work for their voters.

**Related Story: [Why So Many Democratic Candidates Are Dissing Corporate PACs.](#)*

**Related Story: [How Online Money Is Reshaping the Democratic Party.](#)*

[Trump Warns, Democrats Will Enact Change 'Quickly and Violently'](#)

The New York Times

Mr. Trump spent most of his private remarks to the group bragging about having gotten "rid of" the Johnson Amendment, a 1954 provision of tax law that threatened religious organizations, like churches, with the loss of tax-exempt status if they endorse or oppose political candidates. Under that amendment, Mr. Trump said, religious leaders had been prevented from speaking their minds.... In fact, the president has fallen short of that promise. Eliminating the provision in the law would require Congress to act. Instead, Mr. Trump signed an executive order in May 2017 directing the Internal Revenue Service not to aggressively pursue cases in which a church endorses a candidate or makes political donations. Legal experts have said the I.R.S.

has very rarely pursued such cases against churches, and religious leaders have often been outspoken about politics even if they have had to stop short of officially endorsing a candidate. Mr. Trump ignored that reality Monday night. He urged religious leaders to use what he described as their newfound freedom of speech to campaign from the pulpit on behalf of Republican candidates.

[IG Confirms Trump's Involvement in FBI Headquarters Project](#)

Roll Call

President Donald Trump was more intimately involved in the debate over relocating the FBI headquarters than Congress was told, a new inspector general report finds. Rep. Gerald E. Connolly, a Democrat representing parts of Northern Virginia, said the report he requested from the General Services Administration IG confirmed his suspicions that the president was involved in the decision to scrap plans to vacate the J. Edgar Hoover FBI Building on Pennsylvania Avenue, and move the agency to a campus location in either the Maryland or Virginia suburbs.... The IG report confirms the existence of direct interaction with Trump about the project.... In addition to raising more questions about the level of Trump's personal involvement in a project that could easily affect the value of his nearby hotel at the Old Post Office Building, the IG report casts doubt on cost estimates provided to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee back in February, which suggested that a move to the suburbs would actually be more expensive than rebuilding on the same land.

[Student Loan Watchdog Quits Says Trump Administration Harms Students](#)

The New York Times

A top federal official in charge of handling complaints about student loans stepped down on Monday, blasting the Trump administration for protecting predatory lenders at the expense of borrowers. Seth Frotman, the student loan ombudsman at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, said in his resignation letter that millions of borrowers had been harmed by "sweeping changes" at the bureau under Mick Mulvaney, President Trump's budget director, who became the bureau's acting director in November. A copy of the letter was obtained by The New York Times.... "You have used the bureau to serve the wishes of the most powerful financial companies in America," Mr. Frotman wrote to Mr. Mulvaney. "The current leadership of the bureau has abandoned its duty to fairly and robustly enforce the law."

[EPA to Reconsider Obama-ERA Curbs on Mercury Emissions](#)

The New York Times

The Trump administration is reviewing a major Obama-era clean air regulation on the emission of mercury — a pollutant linked with damage to the brain, to the nervous system and to fetal development — with the intent of proposing a replacement rule, a spokeswoman for the Environmental Protection Agency said Wednesday. The E.P.A.'s review of the 2011 mercury rule comes amid a string of initiatives by the Trump administration to roll back or weaken many environmental regulations put forth by the Obama administration. After reviewing the rule, a process which typically takes 60 to 90 days, the E.P.A. will issue a proposed replacement rule, the agency spokeswoman, Molly Block, said in an email. The mercury regulation under review chiefly affects pollution from coal-fired power plants. The move comes as President Trump has pressed forward on numerous fronts in an attempt to meet his campaign pledge to revive the nation's coal industry, despite economic analyses showing that the decline in demand for coal is largely driven by market forces rather than regulations.

[Top Interior Staffer Who Backed Shrinking National Monuments Joins BP](#)

The Washington Post

For much of last year, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's deputy chief of staff pursued his agenda with vigor. Downey Magallanes led an effort to cut the size of two vast protected areas in southern Utah, opening public lands to possible development and energy exploration. She participated in deliberations over how to scale back safety monitoring rules for offshore oil and gas operations. And she helped develop a leasing plan that would permit drilling in most U.S. continental shelf waters. As of next week, Magallanes will have a new job: working for the energy giant BP, on its government affairs team.... Trump's ethics pledge bars political appointees from lobbying their respective agencies for five years after leaving office, and from lobbying anyone in the executive branch for the rest of his administration.... Magallanes, a former aide to Sen. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), would work on congressional relations.

[Qatar Targeted 250 Trump 'Influencers' to Change U.S. Policy](#)

The Wall Street Journal

Qatar wanted to restore good relations with the U.S., Mr. Allaham says. Win over Mr. Trump's influencers, the thinking went, and the president would follow. Qatar's lobbying operation over the next year was an unconventional influence plan to target an unconventional president—and shows how much Mr. Trump has changed the rules of the game in the influence industry. Because Mr. Trump often shuns traditional policy-making processes, relying on advice of friends and associates, interest groups have spent the past 19 months reorienting their lobbying. New approaches include advertising during the president's favorite television shows

and forming ties with people who speak to him. Qatar spent \$16.3 million on lobbying in 2017 in the U.S., the year of the blockade, up from \$4.2 million the year before, according to its federal filings on payments to registered foreign agents. As of June 2018, the country was directly employing 23 lobbying firms, up from seven in 2016, its filings show. It spent some of that on lobbyists with ties to Mr. Trump and paid others to ply the halls of Congress—a typical approach aimed at pressing lawmakers and top administration officials.

[Trump Lawyer Giuliani Got Paid to Lobby Romanian President](#)

POLITICO

Donald Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani was being paid by a global consulting firm when he sent a letter to the president of Romania last week that contradicted the U.S. government's official position. Giuliani's letter to Romanian President Klaus Iohannis appeared to take sides in a fight at the top of the Romanian government over how to rein in high-level corruption. The former New York mayor's letter criticized the "excesses" of Romania's National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA), contrary to U.S. State Department policy which has been supportive of the agency's efforts. Although the missive did not claim to be sent on Trump's authority, Romanian politicians seeking to blunt the power of the DNA have already used it to sow doubt about the U.S. government's position.... William Jeffress Jr, a partner at Baker Botts, said it is surprising that Giuliani had neglected to disclose in the letter that he was acting on behalf of a client. "It is highly unusual, to say the least, for an American lawyer to write the president of a foreign nation to offer advice on that nation's anti-corruption efforts, [but] to do so without identifying the client or clients on whose behalf he is writing is astonishing," Jeffress said. "The only conclusion I can reach is that whoever put him up to this (and paid him) believes he will have influence because, and only because, he is the president's lawyer."

**Related Story: [Giuliani Letter Criticizing Romania Draws State Department Attention.](#)*

[U.S. Probing Whether Malaysian Fugitive Laundered Money to Former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie and Trump Lawyer](#)

The Wall Street Journal

The U.S. Justice Department is investigating whether a fugitive Malaysian financier laundered tens of millions of dollars through two associates and used the funds to pay a U.S. legal team that includes former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and a lawyer who represents President Trump, according to people familiar with the matter. Jho Low, the Malaysian businessman, has been described in U.S. court filings as playing a central role in the alleged embezzlement of \$4.5 billion from a Malaysian fund called 1Malaysia Development. Malaysian authorities this week separately charged Mr. Low with money laundering in the case, which investigators suspect may be one of the biggest financial frauds in history.... The team of lawyers and

consultants working for Mr. Low includes Mr. Christie, who briefly headed Mr. Trump's presidential transition team; Mr. Trump's longtime lawyer Marc Kasowitz ; Bobby Burchfield, a lawyer who has served as the Trump Organization's outside ethics adviser; and Ed Rogers, a Washington lobbyist with close ties to the Republican Party.

[Manafort Associate Charged with Failing to Register as Foreign Agent](#)

POLITICO

Samuel Patten, an associate of former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort, was charged Friday with failing to register as a foreign agent for a pro-Russian Ukrainian political party. The case, being handled by the U.S. attorney for Washington, was referred by special counsel Robert Mueller. The matter was scheduled for an 11 a.m. hearing in a D.C. federal court before Judge Amy Berman Jackson, who is also expected to preside over Manafort's upcoming trial on money laundering charges. Patten's company allegedly received more than \$1 million for its Ukraine work from 2015 to 2017, and contacted officials in Congress and the Executive Branch without properly registering as a foreign agent.

[Most Campaign Contributions Come from Outside Candidates Districts](#)

AXIOS

More than two thirds of individual contributions to 2018 House candidates came from donors outside of the candidates' districts, and Democrats are out-raising Republicans, according to an Axios analysis of Federal Elections Commission data. Why it matters: Maybe all politics is national, not local. Americans on both sides of the aisle know that money influences politics. Yet donating to a candidate you can't vote for doesn't always result in a win.

[McCain Made Campaign Finance Reform a Years-Long Mission](#)

NPR

John McCain devoted much of his career in the Senate to controlling the influence of money in public life — in part to try to recover from his own role in a big congressional influence scandal. McCain, who died Saturday of brain cancer, made money and influence big themes of his first presidential race.... Although McCain, an Arizona Republican, lost the Republican nomination to George W. Bush, his warnings that money was corrupting politics reverberated in many state primaries, amplifying his message and propelling him toward an unexpected legislative triumph in the Senate that helped define his career.... Since it was passed, the Supreme Court has handed down decisions, including Citizens United v. the Federal Elections Commission in 2010, that opened new channels for unlimited and sometimes secret money. The court has also overturned some parts of McCain-Feingold.... McCain reflected on the reversals in a 2014 question-and-answer session at Harvard's Institute of Politics: "We go through it historically:

reform, corruption, reform, corruption," he said. "Right now, in my view, we're at the height of corruption, thanks to the United States Supreme Court."

**Related Story: [McCain's Signature Campaign Finance Law Was a Real Achievement — for Its Time.](#)*

IN THE STATES

[Influences of Big-Money Donors Declined in 2017 Mayoral Election](#)

The New York Times

Mayor Bill de Blasio's emphasis on small donors in last year's mayoral race helped fuel a resurgence of donations of \$175 or less to candidates participating in New York City's matching funds program, according to a [new report](#) by the Campaign Finance Board. The report says that 73 percent of contributors to the mayoral campaigns participating in the program — primarily the campaigns of Mr. Blasio, who was elected to a second term, and his Republican challenger, Nicole Malliotakis — made donations in that range. Donations of \$175 or less by city residents are eligible to receive a six-to-one match of publicly financed campaign cash, creating an incentive for candidates to reach out to small donors. Four years earlier, just 48 percent of contributors to participating candidates made donations at that level, while in 2009, 70 percent of donors gave in that range, according to the report.

[Record Year for Public Financing in Connecticut](#)

CT News Junkie

There are more candidates running for office in Connecticut this year than any other year and a record number of them are using the Citizens' Election Program. So far there have been 317 applications submitted for public financing grants this year. The previous record was 288 in 2014. In 2010, the first year public financing was used in statewide elections there were 263 applications. Prior to the August 14 primary, there had been a 375 percent increase in the number of statewide primary grants awarded over the 2010 and 2014 cycles.... But there are still some challenges. The frontloading of the application process has been difficult for Brandi's small staff to handle, but it doesn't explain the increase in participation.

[U.S. Court Says North Carolina Gerrymander Is Illegal](#)

Reuters

A federal court ruled on Monday that North Carolina Republicans illegally drew up U.S. congressional districts in the state to benefit their party, suggesting that new lines be crafted

before November's election. The three-judge panel for the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of North Carolina said in a 321-page opinion that Republican legislators responsible for the map conducted unconstitutional partisan gerrymandering to dilute the impact of Democratic votes/.... The panel gave parties until Thursday to file their recommendations to fix the problem.... Among the suggestions from the judges were holding state nominating primaries in November with new district lines that remove illegal partisan bias and then holding a general election before the new U.S. Congress is seated in January 2019.

**Related Story: [The Courts Are Saving Democracy in North Carolina.](#)*

[Groups Continue Push for Federal Oversight of Texas Redistricting](#)

Texas Tribune

The voters of color, civil rights groups and Democratic lawmakers who have long challenged the validity of Texas' political maps were dealt a bruising loss earlier this year when the U.S. Supreme Court signed off on most of the state's current political boundaries and pushed aside claims that state lawmakers had intentionally discriminated against voters of color when they drew the maps. But a crucial question remained in the case: Would the state's opponents ask the courts to force Texas back under federal oversight of its electoral map drawing, given previous maps that federal judges ruled discriminatory? Their answer came Wednesday in a series of brief court filings in which some of the plaintiffs in the case indicated they wanted to press forward on those high stakes efforts.

[Georgia County Rejects Plan to Close 7 Polling Places Majority-Black Area](#)

The New York Times

The consultant, a white man, came to the mainly black Randolph County in rural southern Georgia and recommended that it eliminate seven of its nine polling places. He said the move would save the county money. He said the polling places had disability compliance issues. But many people in the county assumed a more sinister motive, especially with the state in the midst of a hotly contested election for governor. It pits a Democrat who would be Georgia's first black chief executive against a white Republican who has been called a "master of voter suppression" by his political opponents.... The Randolph County plan was rejected Friday morning on a 2-0 vote by the county's board of elections. The two members, a black woman and a white man, voted hastily and without comment, leaving a press statement that acknowledged the interest from the news media, residents and civil rights groups.

KEY OPINION

[Trump's Swamp Things](#)

The New York Times (Column by Gail Collins)

On the reform front, Better Deal has a lot of pieces, like making it easier for people to register to vote, increasing the political power of small donors and stronger ethics guidelines. Who could possibly be against any of that? Well, somebody must, since they've never become law. Actually, while Republicans have in recent years been the big brake on reform, anything that affects elections makes elected officials nervous. So it's important to show a lot of enthusiasm when these ideas come up. Even if the words "campaign finance reform" cause your eyes to glaze over, look excited. This is our moment. Anti-swamp proposals are bubbling up all over.

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