



## DEMOCRACY REFORM TASK FORCE WEEKLY NEWS ROUND UP

October 5, 2018

### NATIONAL NEWS

#### [Democrats Want to Prioritize Anti-Corruption Reforms](#)

##### **The Huffington Post**

Over 100 Democratic House candidates penned a letter Thursday calling for Democrats to make campaign finance and electoral reform their highest priority in the next Congress. The letter, signed by 107 Democratic contenders, is the latest sign that the party sees cleaning up corporate influence in Washington and other forms of corruption as a key part of its plan to take control of the House of Representatives. Three-quarters of the candidates who signed the letter have taken End Citizen United PAC's pledge to refuse corporate PAC money. (End Citizens United helped organize Thursday's letter.) "Restoring faith in our elections and in the integrity of our elected officials should be a top priority that all members of Congress can agree upon," the letter reads. "Without these reforms we will be unable to truly regain the public trust or tackle the challenges of our day, like the costs of health care and prescription drugs, the opioid epidemic, or building an economy that is strong for working families."

*\*Related Story: [107 House Candidates to Congress: We Want Campaign Finance Reform.](#)*

#### [Trump Engaged in Tax Schemes as He Reaped Riches from His Father](#)

##### **The New York Times**

President Trump participated in dubious tax schemes during the 1990s, including instances of outright fraud, that greatly increased the fortune he received from his parents, an investigation by The New York Times has found. Mr. Trump won the presidency proclaiming himself a self-made billionaire, and he has long insisted that his father, the legendary New York City builder Fred C. Trump, provided almost no financial help. But The Times's investigation, based on a vast trove of confidential tax returns and financial records, reveals that Mr. Trump received the equivalent today of at least \$413 million from his father's real estate empire, starting when he was a toddler and continuing to this day. Much of this money came to Mr. Trump because he helped his parents dodge taxes. He and his siblings set up a sham corporation to disguise millions of dollars in gifts from their parents, records and interviews show. Records indicate that Mr. Trump helped his

father take improper tax deductions worth millions more. He also helped formulate a strategy to undervalue his parents' real estate holdings by hundreds of millions of dollars on tax returns, sharply reducing the tax bill when those properties were transferred to him and his siblings. These maneuvers met with little resistance from the IRS the Times found.

*\*Related Story:* [New York State Tax Department Reviewing Fraud Allegations Involving Trump.](#)

## [How Trump is Trying — and Failing — To Get Rich Off His Presidency](#)

### **Forbes**

By refusing to divest, Trump raised an unprecedented question: How would the most divisive presidency in modern American history affect a company built on the president's persona? *Forbes* has been working to answer that question since the moment Trump got elected, interviewing nearly 200 colleagues, partners and industry observers. While the experiment continues to unfold, in real time, the early results are in. Much as he's trying—and he's definitely trying—Donald Trump is not getting richer off the presidency. Just the opposite. His net worth, by our calculation, has dropped from \$4.5 billion in 2015 to \$3.1 billion the last two years, knocking the president 138 spots lower on the latest *The Forbes 400* (which will be published in full tomorrow). Three factors are at play. Much of that decline is due to deeper reporting, which revealed, for example, that the president had been lying about the size of his penthouse. Some of it is due to larger market forces. Trump owns commercial space at a time when e-commerce is decimating brick-and-mortar retail, shaving more than \$100 million off his fortune—and no amount of bully-pulpit Amazon-bashing will change that. But the third factor comes from how Trump the president affects Trump the brand.

## [Trump and Son Signal Support for McCarthy as Next Speaker](#)

### **The Hill**

At a private fundraiser at his namesake hotel, President Trump on Thursday night appeared to back Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) to be the next Speaker, several attendees told *The Hill*. Speaking to high-dollar donors and House GOP lawmakers, Trump wished retiring Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) well, then turned to a different table, pointed at McCarthy, and said he looks forward to working with McCarthy next. Several lawmakers in the room said they interpreted Trump's off-the-cuff remarks to mean that he was supporting McCarthy, the No. 2 GOP leader, to succeed Ryan as Speaker of the House next year.... While not an explicit endorsement of McCarthy, Trump's remarks represented the clearest indication yet that the president sees Ryan's top deputy stepping into the Speaker's office should Republicans retain control of the House in November.... Lawmakers at the fundraiser said other Trump family members, including Donald Trump Jr., also expressed support for McCarthy.

## [Trump Directed Legal Action to Enforce Stormy Daniels's Hush Agreement](#)

### **The Wall Street Journal**

President Trump personally directed an effort in February to stop Stormy Daniels from publicly describing an alleged sexual encounter with Mr. Trump, people familiar with the events say. In a phone call, Mr. Trump instructed his then-lawyer Michael Cohen to seek a restraining order against the former adult-film actress, whose real name is Stephanie Clifford, through a confidential arbitration proceeding, one of the people said. Messrs. Trump and Cohen had learned shortly before that Ms. Clifford was considering giving a media...

## [EPA Says A Little Radiation May Be Healthy](#)

### **The Associated Press**

The Trump administration is quietly moving to weaken U.S. radiation regulations, turning to scientific outliers who argue that a bit of radiation damage is actually good for you — like a little bit of sunlight. The government's current, decades-old guidance says that any exposure to harmful radiation is a cancer risk. And critics say the proposed change could lead to higher levels of exposure for workers at nuclear installations and oil and gas drilling sites, medical workers doing X-rays and CT scans, people living next to Superfund sites and any members of the public who one day might find themselves exposed to a radiation release. The Trump administration already has targeted a range of other regulations on toxins and pollutants, including coal power plant emissions and car exhaust, that it sees as costly and burdensome for businesses. Supporters of the EPA's new proposal argue the government's current no-tolerance rule for radiation damage forces unnecessary spending for handling exposure in accidents, at nuclear plants, in medical centers and at other sites.

## [Pruitt's Gone with Investigators on His Trail](#)

### **E&E News**

Scott Pruitt left EPA, but his problems remain. Multiple investigations are still pending against the former administrator, involving everything from his pricey travel back home in Oklahoma to his \$50-a-night Capitol Hill condo rental tied to a lobbyist with business before EPA. Those inquiries will continue to plague Pruitt and the Trump administration as their results come out in the coming months. And if Democrats take the House in November, Pruitt's problems could grow. His foes on Capitol Hill would then hold subpoena power, which they might use to haul him in to testify about his raft of ethics allegations. It all comes as Pruitt looks to move on and his successor tries to move past the scandals that swamped the agency.

## [Where Is Elaine Chao?](#)

### **POLITICO**

Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao's day-to-day calendars are filled with large swaths of time blocked out as "private," according to POLITICO's analysis of newly released records — a pattern that several former DOT officials called unusual. In total, Chao clocked more than 290 hours of appointments labeled private — the equivalent of about seven weeks' vacation — during her first 14 months in President Donald Trump's Cabinet, based on a review of documents provided under the Freedom of Information Act. That total does not include any private hours that occurred on nights, weekends, days marked as vacation or federal holidays. The records, through the end of March 2018, offer a rare view of Chao's activities as leader of Trump's Department of Transportation, which has declined to provide routine access to her schedules. The vast majority of Chao's private appointments occurred on Fridays — frequently after lunchtime, and including nine Fridays when she marked at least five hours as private.

## [Want Public Interest Work? Try Corporate Law: SEC's Peirce](#)

### **Bloomberg Law**

Law students who want to change the world should consider representing corporations as a form of public interest work, SEC Commissioner Hester Peirce said. "Representing corporations also can be a form of public interest law because companies contribute so much to the well-being of society," Peirce told a University of Michigan Law School class in remarks the SEC released Oct. 1. "I am not referring to corporate sponsorship of the local minor-league baseball team, food bank, or youth orchestra," Peirce, who joined the SEC from George Mason University's Mercatus Center, a right-leaning economic policy organization, continued in the Sept. 24 speech. "These charitable activities are laudable, but, to find something good, we need not look beyond the core profit-making activities of the corporation." Peirce noted that public interest law typically refers to work on behalf of nonprofits or government entities, but asked students to "rethink this perspective." Students who end up representing corporate clients have the chance to help companies make ethical decisions as they pursue profit.

## [For Private Prisons, Detaining Immigrants is Big Business](#)

### **The New York Times**

Private companies house about 9 percent of the nation's total prison population. But they take care of a much higher share of immigrant detainees — 73 percent by some accounts.... Studies suggest that governments save little money, if any, by turning over prison functions to private outfits. And in 2016, under President Barack Obama, the Justice Department concluded that private prisons were in general more violent than government-operated institutions, and ordered a phaseout of their use at the federal level. Reversing that order was one of the first things that President Trump's attorney general, Jeff Sessions, did on taking office. The Trump administration

leaves no doubt that it will detain as many undocumented immigrants as it can and send them to for-profit centers. And to help make sure that happens, the companies spend millions on campaigns and lobbying efforts (not unlike businesses that sell cars, real estate or hamburgers). The Trump administration leaves no doubt that it will detain as many undocumented immigrants as it can and send them to for-profit centers.

## [Nonprofits, PACs Pour Big Bucks Into Ad War Over Kavanaugh](#)

### **The Daily Beast**

As the countdown begins on the FBI's investigation into allegations of sexual assault against Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, outside groups hoping to tip the scales on a nomination with the potential to cement a right-wing bloc on the Court for a generation aren't holding back. Rather than pulling back while the FBI interviews some—but reportedly not all—of the three women who have publicly accused Kavanaugh of sexual misconduct, nonprofits, political action committees and advocacy groups are mounting a massive pressure campaign in the hope of swaying senators who are publicly still on the fence about confirming the federal judge to a lifetime post on the highest court in the land... Some organizations are hoping that the renewed focus on the Senate could have a greater political effect than just the vote to confirm Kavanaugh. Indivisible, a group founded following Trump's election, announced that it would re-launch its nationwide phone bank in the hopes of flipping the Senate.

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## IN THE STATES

## [Florida Candidates Set Record for Public Financing](#)

### **The Orlando Sentinel**

With slightly more than a month to go before the November election, Florida statewide candidates have topped a matching-funds record from the 2010 election. Bolstered by small-dollar fundraising in the race for governor, \$6.08 million has been sent by the state to candidates this year, according to figures provided Tuesday by the Florida Division of Elections. A little more than \$400,000 was sent out on Friday to five candidates in the Nov. 6 general election.... In 2010, the state doled out \$6.065 million to 10 candidates in the controversial matching-funds program, which voters approved in 1998 with the intention of diminishing the importance of special-interest money.

## [Corporations Are Striking Back on Ballot Initiatives](#)

### **The Huffington Post**

Ballot measures have produced a wave of ambitious progressive reforms in recent years, from legalizing marijuana to expanding voting rights to granting paid family leave. This year, corporations have become equally ambitious in fighting them — and experts say they're hitting new levels of audacity in doing so. Dialysis companies, for example, have raised \$53 million to fight a California proposition that would cap their profits at 15 percent. In Florida, Disney has teamed up with the Seminole tribe to make competition in the casino sector illegal. Mining companies in Alaska are working to defeat an effort to protect salmon habitats. And Coca-Cola and Pepsi are trying to persuade Washington and Oregon voters to prohibit any tax on groceries — a category that just so happens to include sodas.

## [GOP Pressure Shaped State's District Maps, Court Records Show](#)

### **Detroit News**

Republican mapmakers who drew Michigan's current political districts were pressured to appease lawmakers and made changes to help gain legislative approval, according to documents and depositions in a federal lawsuit. The documents show mapmakers in 2011 gave top party officials the partisan vote history breakdowns of new districts, shared proposed maps with an interest group linked to the DeVos family, entertained suggestions from at least one GOP donor and faced backlash from incumbents vexed at how their districts were redrawn... But Republican then-U.S. Rep. Thad McCotter of Livonia and U.S. Rep. Justin Amash of West Michigan, in particular, were “concerned and at times opposed or threatening to be opposed and disrupting the legislative process” by lobbying lawmakers against the plan, Timmer, a GOP consultant for the Lansing-based Sterling Corp, said in a sworn deposition.

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