



POLITICS

Will State GOPs Run Out of Money?

The Michigan GOP is not the only state party with a treasury running dry. Meanwhile, in New Jersey, the fix is in for the governor's race. Plus, a reflection of Sandra Day O'Connor, legislator.

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Michigan Republican Party chairwoman Kristina Karamo. (TNS)

Editor's Note: this article is a part of Governing's Inside Politics newsletter. [Sign up here.](#)

Will the GOP Run Out of Money?: Ronald Weiser made a fortune in real estate and has devoted vast sums to supporting the Michigan Republican Party. He served three separate terms as the state party chair and, in the 2022 midterm cycle, wrote checks to the party to the tune of \$4.5 million. At this point, however, he's cut the party off, angry about its devolution into election denialism.

Losing a major donor is always a blow, but in Michigan it's particularly bad news, since the party had grown almost wholly reliant on Weiser and the DeVos family (including former federal Education Secretary Betsy DeVos) for its funding. "These state parties are not getting contributions because the traditional big donors do not trust them with their money," says Ray La Raja, an expert on political parties at the University of Massachusetts. "What you are seeing in some parties is a rejection of the MAGA brand by donors."

Major donors are still writing big checks, whether to super PACs or individual candidates for the presidency. Once Republicans settle on a nominee, the campaign and the Republican National Committee (RNC) will doubtless hold joint fundraising efforts, which has become the norm. Whether it's Donald Trump or someone else, the eventual nominee will have plenty of financial support.

But the Michigan GOP is not the only state party with a treasury running dry. Republican parties in the key states of Arizona and Georgia have also run short of cash. This spring, the Colorado Republican Party was [unable to pay its own staff](#), while this summer the Minnesota Republican Party reported it had just [\\$54 in cash on hand](#), a sum dwarfed by more than \$300,000 in debts. "For the price of a new Xbox game, you, too, can own your own state party," quipped Scott Howard in the conservative [National Review](#).

Things aren't much better at the national level. The RNC reports that at the end of October, it had just \$9.1 million cash on hand – its lowest total since early in 2015 and a fraction of its accounts at equivalent points in the 2016 and 2020 presidential cycles.

"The more populist wing of the party, which used to be in the minority, never had much of a donor class within its ranks," says Seth Masket, a University of Denver political scientist who's writing a [Substack about the GOP presidential primary](#).

“The more ‘establishment’ donors now find themselves in the minority within the party and are watching the party moving away from their vision.”

It’s now an open question whether some state parties will recover in time to play a constructive role in 2024. They’re not just out of cash but losing credibility in terms of their traditional roles as honest brokers, which involves not only giving different wings a say, but bringing them together as part of winning coalitions.

The Michigan GOP now acts like it’s auditioning to play both sides on an episode of “Family Feud.” In August, an [actual brawl](#) broke out at a committee meeting. This past weekend, the party split into two, like the [14th-century papacy](#), with different factions holding [entirely separate meetings](#), denying party chair Kristina Karamo a quorum and any ability to conduct official business.



Tammy Murphy, wife of New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy. (TNS)

In New Jersey, the Fix Is In: Local parties still matter. Even when it comes to presidential politics, county chairs matter because they’re close to the grass roots

and their support both shapes and signals which way the party is going, Masket wrote recently in *Politico*.

Is that a bad thing? Some people in New Jersey think it is. County Democratic parties in New Jersey are about the closest thing the country has left to the political machines that were so dominant early in the 20th century. With U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez [under indictment](#) and in disgrace, local Democrats are lining up behind a candidate to replace him next year.

Who are they coalescing behind? Tammy Murphy, the wife of Gov. Phil Murphy. She's never held elective office and used to vote in Republican primary contests, yet many key local Democrats are lining up in support. She's already gotten endorsements from the party chairs in the state's four largest counties. That's an important prize in New Jersey, because it practically guarantees Tammy Murphy will get the [county line](#) – the section of the primary ballot reserved for party-endorsed candidates in all but two New Jersey counties.

This angers progressives, who would prefer the nomination to go to Congressman Andy Kim, who entered the race ahead of Tammy Murphy. Or at least that he have a fighting change. “The whims of unelected county party chairs almost always dictate who gets into office and what policies get enacted,” writes [David Dayen](#), editor of the liberal *American Prospect*, suggesting that New Jersey Democrats are trading the “hard corruption” of Robert Menendez for the “soft corruption” of machine politics.

But the process of having county parties endorse candidates is not inherently corrupt, says John Froomjian, who directs the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University in Galloway, N.J. Parties are in the business of nominating electable candidates. Although there are plenty of complaints these days about primary electorates nominating more extreme candidates, without the endorsement system, Froomjian suggests, more fringe candidates with no hope of winning would end up winning primaries. “The county line is how the county party communicates who it wants as its nominees,” he says. “Most people who vote in primaries are really dedicated party supporters and activists, and they support their party leadership.”

[La Raja](#) and [other political scientists](#) have argued that parties should play a more active role in vetting candidates at the presidential level, as they did in the old days. But finding the right balance between shaping outcomes and determining them is tough. Last week, the [Florida Democratic Party](#) announced that its executive committee has determined that President Biden is the only legitimate candidate for president, which means a primary won't even be held. Other Democratic campaigns may sue.

In New Jersey, it is possible to beat the machine, but it's rare. Last week, the *New Jersey Globe* recounted the story of the time [Jim Florio](#), a future governor, took on the Democratic machine in Camden County, running an alternate slate of candidates who won. But that was all the way back in the 1970s. "The exercise of raw power is how politics is played and how it's won," Froonjian says.

Each summer, his center runs a four-day training session on how to get political power for community activists who aren't part of the traditional power structure, in partnership with a social justice group called [Building One America](#). For now, though, it looks like the power brokers are about to get their way once again. Tammy Murphy will make history as the first governor's wife ever elected directly to the Senate. Even Congressman Rob Menendez, the disgraced senator's son, is [expected to endorse](#) Murphy.



Sandra Day O'Connor (TNS)

Sandra Day O'Connor, Legislator: O'Connor, who died last Friday at 93, made history as the first woman associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. She'd earlier served as majority leader of the Arizona Senate in the early 1970s – the highest leadership post a woman had reached in any upper chamber to that time. By the time O'Connor left the Senate in 1974, 1 out of 5 of its members were women, eroding the former frat boy atmosphere of the chamber. One of her earliest pieces of legislation abolished a 1913 state law that limited women to working eight hours a day.

Her experience in Phoenix mattered when she served on the court. Like earlier politicians-turned-justices, including former California Gov. Earl Warren and former Sen. Hugo Black of Alabama, O'Connor understood practical politics. That not only lent her expertise when it came to overtly political questions such as redistricting, but made her an effective negotiator within court chambers – and gave her a sense of the importance of at least being aware of where the public stood on a given issue.

“She understood the importance of compromise,” writes her biographer [Evan Thomas](#). “O’Connor had keen political instincts, and she preferred to live in the world of the possible, to go for better if best was not immediately obtainable.”

During her time in the Arizona Senate, legislators wanted to avoid holding an up-or-down vote on the Equal Rights Amendment, which would have barred discrimination against women. The best way to do that, O’Connor concluded, was to get rid of discriminatory statutes, rendering the ERA redundant. Stan Akers, the House speaker at the time, called it a “stupid idea,” but quickly changed his mind. In one fell swoop, the Legislature amended more than 400 laws that discriminated against women.

O’Connor, so far anyway, is the last [former politician](#) to serve on the Supreme Court. “O’Connor always had an almost uncanny instinct for the popular mood,” Thomas writes. “O’Connor was innately moderate, a balancer, the kind of person who could reconcile competing demands.”



Alan Greenblatt

Alan Greenblatt is the editor for *Governing*. He can be found on Twitter at [@AlanGreenblatt](#).

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