

POLITICO Playbook: Palin returns with a thud in Alaska

By GARRETT ROSS

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DRIVING THE DAY

TRUMP MAKES IT OFFICIAL — Former President **DONALD TRUMP** announced his endorsement of **J.D. VANCE** in the Ohio Senate GOP primary on Friday evening, spurning last-minute efforts from Republicans in the state who tried to call Trump off. Vance has been trailing other contenders in polling, including **JOSH MANDEL** and **MIKE GIBBONS** — making Trump’s nod especially valuable, but also especially risky.

To that point, WaPo’s Josh Dawsey and Mike Scherer have a good read this morning on Trump’s go-for-broke mentality on picking favorites in key races: “With his endorsements of **[MEHMET] OZ**, Senate candidate **TED BUDD** in North Carolina, gubernatorial hopeful **DAVID PERDUE** in Georgia and, on Friday, author and Senate candidate J.D. Vance in Ohio, Trump has leaped into the middle of several competitive primaries that could put his desired image as a kingmaker at risk.”

Money quote from Trump to an unnamed adviser: “I’m a gambler.”

BEST SATURDAY READ ...

LETTER FROM ALASKA — **SARAH PALIN** is back, jumping into the crowded race to fill the late Rep. **DON YOUNG**’s seat in Congress. Her campaign announcement drew immediate national headlines and interest and a swift endorsement from Trump. But back home in Alaska, Palin has a ways to go to get back in voters’ good graces. Our colleague David Siders went to Wasilla, Alaska to take their temperature on her bid for the state’s sole congressional seat: **The 2008, populist folk-hero-of-the-right version of Palin**, Siders writes, “would have thundered into a mere congressional race like a ‘mama grizzly’ (her term), easily clearing out any local competition. And she may yet win, purely on name recognition. Yet here, in her own hometown, Republicans were laughing at her. ‘She’s not seen around much,’ **SHELLEY HUGHES**, the Republican state Senate majority leader, told me.”

Now, running for the seat of the late Rep. DON YOUNG, “Palin is the embodiment of several conflicting truths in American politics. In one sense, she is all potential — a celebrity candidate in the age of celebrity candidates; a mere 58 years old at a time when national leadership is contested among people pushing 80.

“But she’s also heavily encumbered with baggage, a losing candidate at the national level with a long series of tabloidy family dramas and minor scandals. Here in Alaska, she also personifies the tension between local and national politics, and her candidacy could be a referendum on which matters more. She is deeply unpopular in her home state.”

A sampling of quotes from Alaskans:

- **“I mean, I don’t know that I know anybody that’s thrilled about it.** But, I mean, it’s happening.”
- **“Oh, God, I loved her when she was governor**, but I was pissed that she left. Alaskans don’t quit on anything ... She got sucked in by the glamor of all that Washington, D.C., bullshit, in my opinion. ... I just feel like it’s been so long, I don’t know if she’s relevant anymore.”
- **“I just think Sarah these days is not a person to be taken seriously**, and I think she’s desperate for the attention she once had.”

Good Saturday morning. Happy Pesach to members of the tribe, and thanks for reading Playbook. [Drop me a line here](#), or get in touch with the rest of the team: **Rachael Bade, Eugene Daniels, Ryan Lizza**.

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN AND VP KAMALA HARRIS’ SATURDAY: The president and vice president have nothing on their public schedules.

DON'T MISS ANYTHING FROM THE 2022 MILKEN INSTITUTE GLOBAL CONFERENCE: POLITICO is excited to partner with the Milken Institute to produce a special edition "Global Insider" newsletter featuring exclusive coverage and insights from the 25th annual Global Conference. This year's event, May 1-4, brings together more than 3,000 of the world’s most influential leaders, including 700+ speakers representing more than 80 countries. "Celebrating the Power of Connection" is this year's theme, setting the stage to connect influencers with the resources to change the world with leading experts and thinkers whose insight and creativity can implement that change. Whether you're attending in person or following along from somewhere else in the world, keep up with this year's conference with POLITICO’s special edition “Global Insider” so you don't miss a beat. [Subscribe today](#).

PLAYBOOK READS

9 THINGS WE READ THAT STUCK WITH US:

1. Meet DAN O’DOWD, a California software magnate who wants to take down **ELON MUSK** by spending millions on ads crusading against the polarizing tech mogul. Oh, and Dowd is also planning to launch a Senate campaign with a cadre of veteran Dem operatives (including

admaker **MARK PUTNAM**) behind him. But sources familiar with the rollout told our colleague Chris Cadelago “that O’Dowd’s team has privately been adamant he’s not trying to unseat freshman Democratic Sen. **ALEX PADILLA**, who was appointed last year when Kamala Harris ascended to the vice president job. Instead, O’Dowd’s play for the Senate is likely being carried out as a cost-saving measure and to significantly enhance the likelihood that networks will air his TV spots.”

But here’s what’s worrying Dems: “Democrats fear that O’Dowd’s ad campaign alone could land him in a runoff — potentially complicating what until now was viewed as a straightforward path forward for Padilla.”

O’Dowd’s beef with Musk: It’s a classic Silicon Valley tale. His company “makes competing software to Tesla’s and O’Dowd has publicly derided Musk’s electric vehicles as poor performing and dangerous. Musk has responded with broadsides in kind.” **Buckle up, so to speak.**

2. BEHIND THE BIDENS’ TAXES: The Bidens released their annual tax returns on Friday (don’t forget the deadline is Monday!): Joe and Jill brought in \$610,702 in adjusted gross income for 2021: They paid \$150,439 in federal income tax (an effective rate of 24.6 percent), \$30,765 in Delaware income tax and \$2,721 in Virginia income tax. Their income: Biden made \$378,333 as president and Jill Biden \$67,116 teaching at Northern Virginia Community College. Most of the rest came from pensions and Social Security. *WSJ’s Laura Saunders and Catherine Lucey have more*

3. HMMM ... A fundraising committee run by Reps. **MARJORIE TAYLOR GREENE** (R-Ga.) and **MATT GAETZ** (R-Fla.) reportedly made some sizable payments to a controversial figure in Q1: former Trump lawyer **JOHN EASTMAN**. “Put America First ... paid at least \$25,000 for legal services since September to the Constitutional Counsel Group,” *Nancy Vu and Kyle Cheney write for Congress Minutes*. But further details about the payments are scant, so what exactly they’re for is a mystery.

4. FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES: If you’re a prominent senator who wants to head off any would-be challengers from mounting a primary against you, it helps to have powerful — and rich — friends in your corner. Sen. **KYRSTEN SINEMA** seems to have found exactly that. *CNBC’s Brian Schwartz reports* that the Arizona Democrat received max individual campaign contributions from J.P. Morgan Chase CEO **JAMIE DIMON** and other bank execs in the first quarter of 2022.

5. THE NEW GOP: Scandals used to mean something for political candidates — torpedoing campaigns before they even got off the ground. But now, they’ve become just another part of the process. “In Missouri, Georgia, Ohio and now Nebraska, Republican men running for high office face significant allegations of domestic violence, stalking, even sexual assault — accusations that once would have derailed any run for office. But in an era of Republican politics when Donald J. Trump could survive and thrive amid accusations of sexual assault, opposing candidates are finding little traction in dwelling on the issues,” *NYT’s Jonathan Weisman writes*. “The candidates who do speak of their opponents’ domestic violence and assault allegations often

raise them not as disqualifications in looming Republican primaries, but as matters ripe for exploitation by Democrats in the fall.”

6. THE NEW DUNK CONTEST: ALEX WALKER is going viral. You can find the 31-year-old on various social media apps — like Twitter and TikTok — as he tries to mount a campaign to unseat Rep. **LAUREN BOEBERT** in Colorado. But the nature of his gambit leaves him open to people laughing both with, and at, his online presence. “He’s following a now tried-and-true playbook of whipping up views on the Internet, then leveraging that attention to build a national audience. Sometimes it can provide a powerful nationwide donor base, but increasingly candidates are recognizing that while an online following is a currency worth amassing, it can be unwieldy,” WaPo’s Taylor Lorenz and David Weigel report.

7. LESS MONEY, MORE PROBLEMS: HHS has asked Congress for money to set up its first climate office, a small but ambitious operation designed to curb the impact climate change is having on human health. But the effort is struggling to get off the ground as it’s met with a lack of urgency and funding, our colleague Sarah Owerhohle reports. “Without any money or a permanent staff to address the public health effects of global warming, low-income and elderly populations are likely to suffer devastating consequences from weather emergencies to chronic illnesses, leading to preventable deaths and costing the government billions of dollars.”

8. In the ongoing information war, Russia is finding new ammunition to blast out on its airwaves. “The narratives advanced by the Kremlin and by parts of conservative American media have converged in recent months, reinforcing and feeding each other,” NYT’s Stuart Thompson writes. “Along the way, Russian media has increasingly seized on Fox News’s prime-time segments, its opinion pieces and even the network’s active online comments section — all of which often find fault with the Biden administration — to paint a critical portrait of the United States and depict America’s foreign policy as a threat to Russia’s interests.”

9. ICYMI: Ukrainian President VOLODYMYR ZELENSKYY sat down for an interview with The Atlantic’s Anne Applebaum and Jeffrey Goldberg in Kyiv.

Three passages stood out to us:

— “**Much of Zelensky’s time is spent on the telephone**, on Zoom, on Skype, answering the questions of presidents and prime ministers — often the same questions, repeated to a maddening degree. ‘I like *new* questions,’ he said. ‘It’s not interesting to answer the questions you already heard.’ He is frustrated, for instance, by repeated requests for his wish list of weapons systems. ‘When some leaders ask me what weapons I need, I need a moment to calm myself, because I already told them the week before. **It’s Groundhog Day. I feel like Bill Murray.**’”

— “**Throughout the conversation, Zelensky displayed** his gifts for spontaneity, irony, and sarcasm. He didn’t tell jokes, exactly, but he said that he cannot part with humor altogether. ‘I think that any normal person cannot survive without it. Without a sense of humor, as surgeons say, they would not be able to perform surgeries — to save lives and to lose people as well. They would simply lose their minds without humor.’

“The same is true now for Ukrainians: ‘We can see what a tragedy we have, and it’s hard to live with it. But you have to live with it . . . You can’t be serious about what Russian politicians and Lukashenko say every day. If you take it seriously, you might as well go and hang yourself.’ Is Putin afraid of humor? ‘Very much so,’ Zelensky said.”

— **“He has two children, he reminded us.** ‘My daughter is almost 18. I don’t want to imagine, but if something had happened to my daughter, I would not have been satisfied if the attack had been repelled and the soldiers had run away,’ he said. ‘I would have looked for these people and I would have found them. And then I would feel victory.’ What would he have done when he found them? ‘I don’t know. Everything.’ . . . ‘There will be no complete victory for people who lost their children, relatives, husbands, wives, parents. That’s what I mean,’ he said. ‘They will not feel the victory, even when our territories are liberated.’”

CLICKER — **“The nation’s cartoonists on the week in politics,”** edited by Matt Wuerker
— *17 funnies*

GREAT WEEKEND READS, curated by Ryan Lizza:

— **“Why The Past 10 Years Of American Life Have Been Uniquely Stupid,”** by The Atlantic’s Jonathan Haidt: “It’s not just a phase.”

— **“Washington Was an Icon of Black Political Power. Then Came Gentrification,”** by our colleagues Steven Overly, Delece Smith-Barrow, Katy O’Donnell and Ming Li: “Washington’s story is just one instance of a nationwide trend. A POLITICO analysis found nine of the 10 American cities with the largest Black populations experienced a decline over the past two decades.”

— **“A.I. Is Mastering Language. Should We Trust What It Says?”** by Steven Johnson for NYT Magazine: “OpenAI’s GPT-3 and other neural nets can now write original prose with mind-boggling fluency — a development that could have profound implications for the future.”

— **“This Startup Wants to Get in Your Ears and Watch Your Brain,”** by Wired’s Steven Levy: “Born from Alphabet’s ‘moonshot’ division, NextSense aims to sell earbuds that can collect heaps of neural data—and uncover the mysteries of gray matter.”

— **“A day in the life of (almost) every vending machine in the world,”** by The Guardian’s Tom Lamont: “What’s behind the indestructible appeal of the robotic snack?”

— **“The Time I Crossed Paths with a Modern Day Huck Finn,”** by Ben McGrath for Outside: “In an excerpt from his new book, ‘Riverman,’ writer Ben McGrath recounts how he met an itinerant canoeist named Dick Conant, a fascinating character who mysteriously disappeared shortly thereafter.”

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PLAYBOOKERS

Mike DeWine tested positive for the coronavirus and is experiencing mild symptoms.

Jen Psaki tried to set the record straight on her comments on Peter Doocy: “He is doing his job. I am doing mine. We debate. We disagree. I respect that.”

Keisha Lance Bottoms said she was turned away from the Capital Grille for wearing leggings.

The National Zoo today is celebrating 50 years since giant pandas **Ling-Ling** and **Hsing-Hsing** arrived in D.C.

WELCOME TO THE WORLD —**Raisa Orleans**, director of federal affairs at the Environmental Defense Fund, and **Jeff Vanderslice**, director of government and external affairs at the Cato Institute, welcomed Reid Martin Vanderslice, their third son, on Thursday.

— **Dilan Maxfield**, digital director for Sen. Mitt Romney (R-Utah), and **Paige Maxfield**, a high school English teacher in northern Virginia, welcomed Maeve Maxfield on Tuesday.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY: Secretary of State **Antony Blinken** (6-0) ... Rep. **Frank Mrvan** (D-Ind.) ... **Ann Romney** ... Prime Policy Group's **Scott Pastrick** ... **Morgan Jones** ... NEA's **Ramona Oliver** ... **Matt Duckworth** ... **Sally-Shannon Birkel** of the U.S. Chamber ... **Deborah Zabarenko** ... Reuters' **Andy Sullivan** ... **Fran Holuba** ... **Sefy Hendler** ... **Fred Graefe** ... **Spencer Brown** ... POLITICO's **Dan Ashwood** and **Jessica Owusu-Danso**... **Chris Eddowes** of Rep. Lloyd Smucker's (R-Pa.) office ... **Doug Heye** ... **Bradley Beychok** of Atlas Crossing ... **Katie Oppenheim** ... ExxonMobil's **Nick McGee** ... **Tori O'Neal-McElrath** ... S&P Global's **Josh Goldstein** ... **Virginia Coyne** ... Fox News' **Mary Grace Lucas** (4-0) ... AP's **Ted Anthony** ... **Brett Coughlin** ... NBC's **Mosheh Gains** ... Goldman Sachs' **John F.W. Rogers** ... **Frances Lanzone** of Amazon ... **Jake Matilsky** ... **Howard Bauleke** ... former Alaska Gov. **Bill Walker** (who's running for the office again)... former Reps. **Cliff Stearns** (R-Fla.) and **John Delaney** (D-Md.) ... former VA Secretary **Anthony Principi**

THE SHOWS (Full Sunday show listings here):

FOX “Fox News Sunday,” guest-anchored by Mike Emanuel: House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy ... Ashish Jha. **Panel:** Ben Domenech, Josh Kraushaar, Catherine Lucey and Mo Elleithe.

CBS “Face the Nation”: Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba ... Sen. Chris Coons (D-Del.) ... David Beasley ... retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges ... Sister Norma Pimentel.

NBC “Meet the Press”: Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer ... Ashish Jha ... Rep. Fred Upton (R-Mich.) ... Matt Bradley. **Panel:** Matthew Continetti, Eugene Daniels, Ruth Marcus and Amna Nawaz.

MSNBC “The Sunday Show”: NYC Mayor Eric Adams ... Beto O’Rourke ... Ivo Daalder ... Maria Hinojosa ... Raquel Willis ... George Hahn.

CNN “State of the Union”: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy ... Dave Matthews.

CNN “Inside Politics”: **Panel:** Karoun Demirjian, Evelyn Farkas and retired Brig. Gen. Steven Anderson. **Panel:** Melanie Zanona, Molly Ball and Jordan Fabian.

ABC “This Week”: Ukrainian PM Denys Shmyhal ... Keechant Sewell ... NYC Mayor Eric Adams ... Ashish Jha. **Panel:** Rachel Scott, Chris Christie, Donna Brazile and María Elena Salinas.

*Send Playbookers tips to playbook@politico.com. Playbook couldn’t happen without our editor **Mike Zapler**, deputy editor **Zack Stanton** and producers **Bethany Irvine, Eli Okun** and **Garrett Ross**.*

A message from The American Beverage Association:

America’s leading beverage companies - The Coca-Cola Company, Keurig Dr Pepper and PepsiCo - are committed to reducing our industry’s plastic footprint through our Every Bottle Back initiative.

Learn how our bottles are made to be remade:

Made to be remade: We’re carefully designing our plastic bottles from PET, which is the most valuable and recyclable plastic available.

Community recycling: We’re investing in communities across the country to improve recycling infrastructure, so even more of our bottles can be collected and remade into new bottles.

Not all plastic is the same: Our bottles are sorted and separated from other plastics, so they can be cleaned and ground into pellets to make new bottles.

Closed loop: We use the recycled plastic to make new bottles, reducing the amount of new plastic we use and preventing our bottles from ending up in the environment.