

NEWSLETTER

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## An 'intel operation' against liberal nonprofits

BY: JACOB WENDLER | 06/04/2026 05:13 PM EDT

Presented by

*With help from Alex Gangitano, Abigail Hatting and Daniel Lippman*

The Trump administration has been unrelenting in its efforts to target liberal nonprofits, and one group has been instrumental in supplying the GOP with the research to do so: the **Capital Research Center**.

— The conservative watchdog group's president **Scott Walter**, a former **George W. Bush** adviser, is unabashed about its goal to spark GOP action against liberal organizations. "We're the intel operation for the conservative movement as a whole," he told PI. Still, he says CRC is not responsible for what the administration chooses to do with its work: "This is not a sexy collusion story — we are simply educating them, and they decide what to do with our public research," he said.

— Walter has been briefing Trump administration officials on the group's research about specific liberal nonprofits for months, as [The New York Times first reported](#). He told PI his latest meeting with senior officials from the White House and other departments was a few weeks ago, and said he has distributed materials on **ActBlue** and the **Southern Poverty Law Center** — two groups that recently landed in the GOP's crosshairs. The Justice Department [indicted the SPLC](#) on fraud charges in April, and Hill Republicans are set to grill ActBlue's CEO next week.

— CRC staffer **Ryan Mauro** [said last year](#) that the group's investigation into the **Open Society Foundations**, the nonprofit funded by Democratic megadonor **George Soros**' family, was designed to “equip the Trump administration with what they need in order to take action” against him. Days after his comments, a Justice Department official reportedly [directed a group of federal prosecutors](#) to investigate Soros.

— The Justice Department did not respond to a request for comment. The White House said in a statement that “the administration regularly meets with a variety of organizations on important topics.”

— With just over 30 staffers, CRC publishes regular reports on its online database InfluenceWatch about nonprofits, many of which it suspects have ties to the Democratic Party. CRC is “one of the first places you would turn if you [want] outside help” on investigating liberal nonprofits, a former Trump administration official granted anonymity to discuss internal dynamics told PI.

— “I think it's clear that the role CRC has been playing is as a sort of information-gathering arm to supply the administration with rationales to go after certain groups,” said **Michael Clauw** of the watchdog group **Campaign for Accountability** — one of many nonprofits that has landed on CRC's InfluenceWatch site. “And many times it's been revealed that those stated rationales don't really hold any water and don't stand up to scrutiny.”

— Walter, for his part, insists CRC's research is sound. “The rule for the whole staff is, ‘if you can't document it, don't say it in public,’” he said.

**Happy Thursday and welcome to PI.** Let's get coffee: [jwendler@politico.com](mailto:jwendler@politico.com) and [dbarnes@politico.com](mailto:dbarnes@politico.com) or message us on Signal at [jwendler.89](https://signal.me/jwendler.89) and [danielbarnes.13](https://signal.me/danielbarnes.13). And don't forget to follow us on X at [@jacob\\_wendler](https://twitter.com/jacob_wendler) and [@dnlbrns](https://twitter.com/dnlbrns).

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A message from Williams:

America has abundant, affordable energy. But red tape keeps it from reaching the people and businesses that need it. Real permitting reform means stopping states from weaponizing the Clean Water Act, ending

activist lawsuits and building the pipelines America needs. See why Congress cannot afford to deliver half-measures at [RealPermitReform.com](https://RealPermitReform.com).

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**READ THE DRAFT AI LEGISLATION:** Reps. **Jay Obernolte** (R-Calif.) and **Lori Trahan** (D-Mass.) finally rolled out their highly anticipated artificial intelligence discussion draft earlier today, [your host reports](#) with Brendan Bordelon, Gabby Miller and Meredith Lee Hill. The 269-page document, [obtained by POLITICO](#) this morning, would require top AI companies to create and implement plans to address any potentially catastrophic risks posed by their advanced models.

— AI safety groups — including **Americans for Responsible Innovation** and the **Alliance for Secure AI** — were quick to criticize the proposal's preemption of state rules on AI developers. **Joseph Hoefler** of bipartisan firm **Monument Advocacy** told PI that a sunset provision allowing states to resume regulating advanced AI development after three years was “one of the most telling provisions in the package,” saying the lawmakers are signaling they view the framework “as an experiment in frontier-AI governance rather than a permanent regulatory architecture.”

— The draft legislation comes as Silicon Valley eyes Congress as the next audience for its pitches around AI regulation after Trump [signed his executive order](#) earlier this week. OpenAI CEO **Sam Altman** was on the Hill yesterday meeting with key legislators, and a group of AI CEOs — including Altman, **Dario Amodei** of **Anthropic** and **Demis Hassabis** of **Google DeepMind** — urged Congress to take action to protect against biological threats posed by the technology in [a new open letter](#).

**A FOREIGN AGENT GUILTY PLEA:** **Thomas Pauken II**, an American who worked as a journalist for state-run media in China, [pleaded guilty earlier today](#) to working as an unregistered agent for the Chinese government in the U.S., our colleague Josh Gerstein reports from a courthouse in Alexandria, Va. Pauken told U.S. District Judge **Leonie Brinkema** during his plea hearing that he was unaware of the legal requirement to register before acting for a foreign government.

— Pauken said he consistently rebuffed his Chinese handler's requests for classified information, but told law enforcement that he thought there was an 80 percent chance another individual — who ultimately landed a job in the Trump administration — would provide classified information to China, according to an FBI affidavit that your host [reported on with Josh](#) last week.

— The hearing comes a day after the Five Eyes — an international partnership between the intelligence agencies of Britain, the U.S., Canada, Australia and New Zealand — [issued a rare joint bulletin](#) warning that Chinese spies are trying to recruit and compromise government personnel via professional networking sites like **LinkedIn**.

— **Charles Burnham**, Pauken’s attorney, handed reporters a statement after the hearing saying his client “accepted responsibility” for his actions and that “Mr. Pauken urges all Americans working internationally to be ever mindful of the Foreign Agent[s] Registration Act and related federal laws so what happened to him does not happen to you.”

**HILL AIDES HEAD DOWNTOWN:** Two senior House GOP aides are leaving Congress for K Street: **Hayden Haynes**, chief of staff to Speaker **Mike Johnson**, is joining **K&L Gates** as a government affairs counselor in its public policy and law practice. And **Dylan Frost**, a longtime aide to House Financial Services Chair **French Hill** (R-Ark.), is joining tax and financial services lobbying firm **PhronesisDC**.

— “I’ve spent my career helping leaders navigate complex policy challenges and build consensus in high-pressure environments,” Haynes said in a statement. “What drew me to K&L Gates is the firm’s collaborative culture and its ability to bring together premier legal, policy, and business advisors to solve clients’ most important challenges.”

— Frost, meanwhile, most recently oversaw downtown coalitions engagement and member services for Hill’s Financial Services panel. “Dylan was a valuable asset to my team for more than 10 years,” Hill told PI in a statement. “He helped lead my legislative team since I came to Congress where we had tremendous success working for Central Arkansans.”

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A message from Williams:



**SPOTTED** yesterday at Joe's Seafood for a fundraiser for Rep. **Byron Donalds** (R-Fla.), hosted by **CGCN Group: Harrison Fields, Ja'Ron Smith, John Stipicevic** and **Sam Geduldig** of CGCN and **Michael "Harry-O" Harris**.

**SPOTTED** last night on the rooftop of 101 Constitution at **TikTok's** creator economy event: Reps. Donalds, **Jim McGovern** (D-Mass.), **William Timmons** (R-S.C.), **Beth Van Duyne** (R-Texas), **Anna Paulina Luna** (R-Fla.), **Roger Williams** (R-Texas), **Jim Himes** (D-Conn.) and **Tim Kennedy** (D-N.Y.), Paris 2024 Olympian **Chari Hawkins**, **Jack Mancuso** AKA Chef Cuso, Canadian TV personality **Shira Lazar**, **Hannah Williams** of Salary Transparent Street, **Bill Briggs** of the Small Business Administration, former Washington Capitals player **T.J. Oshie** and influencer **Jennifer Gay**.

**SPOTTED** Tuesday night at the Florida House for **Incubate's** Biotech in Your Backyard BBQ: Sen. **Todd Young** (R-Ind.), **John Stanford** of Incubate, **David Lachmann** of **Biotechnology Innovation Organization**, **Tim Scott** of **Biocom**, **Jessica Nagro** of **Regeneron** and **Priscilla VanderVeer** of **No Patient Left Behind**.

#### WHAT ELSE WE'RE READING

- [Obscure Group With Trump Ties Plans to Route Funds to His Allies for Legal Fights](#), per NYT
- [Oil industry warns Trump administration of price spikes within weeks](#), per our colleagues Ben Lefebvre and James Bikales
- [‘I’m not a kingmaker’: Hasan Piker grapples with limits of his influence](#), per our colleague William Steakin

#### FLYING IN

The **Insured Retirement Institute** hosted its annual fly-in today to advocate for the bipartisan [Auto Reenroll Act](#), which would allow employers to automatically re-enroll workers in retirement plans, and the [Helping Young Americans Save for Retirement Act](#), which would make more adults under 21 eligible for employer-sponsored retirement plans. The group had meetings set up with Sen. **Tim Kaine** (D-Va.) and Reps. **Rick Allen** (R-Ga.), **Pete Aguilar** (D-Calif.), **Andy Barr** (R-Ky.), **Frank Lucas** (R-Okla.), **John Mannion** (D-N.Y.), **Joe Morelle** (D-N.Y.), **Richard Neal** (D-Mass.), **Zach Nunn** (R-Iowa), **Linda Sánchez** (D-Calif.), **Tom Suozzi** (D-N.Y.), **Mike Thompson** (D-Calif.), **Ann Wagner** (R-Mo.) and **Tim Walberg** (R-Mich.).

#### JOBS REPORT

- **Adria Márquez Trejo** was named president and CEO of **The American Mexican Leadership Council**. She’s chair of the **Obama Latinos Alumni Association** and was previously vice president of global digital communications at the **Motion Picture Association**.
- **Joe Gage** was named chair of the **Catholic Health Association**’s board of trustees for 2026-2027. He’s the CAO of **Bon Secours Mercy Health**.
- **Jacki McGavick** has joined the communications team at **Kalshi**. She was previously policy comms director at the White House.
- **Anne Neuberger** is joining **a16z** as a partner and its first head of global affairs. She’s an alum of the National Security Agency and of Biden’s National Security Council.
- **Hershel Eisenberger** is joining **Etsy** as global head of privacy and AI. He was previously the head of global privacy and data protection for **Coca-Cola** and is a Pentagon alum.
- **Amanda Marsh** has joined **Resolute** as senior vice president of paid media, marketing and business development. She is a **ROKK** and **POLITICO** alum.

– **Spencer Pederson** is joining **Ridgeline Advocacy Group** as a partner. He was most recently SVP of public affairs at the **National Electrical Manufacturers Association** and is a Sen. **Tim Scott** (R-S.C.) alum.

– **David Haaf** is joining **FMI – The Food Industry Association** as vice president of fresh foods. He was most recently president and CEO of the **International Dairy Deli Bakery Association**.

– **Katherine (Thomas) Grady** has joined the **Association of Equipment Manufacturers** as director of federal affairs. She most recently worked for the Senate Committee on Agriculture.

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A message from Williams:

Energy usage is growing, but America's infrastructure isn't keeping up. Natural gas demand has surged by 50%, but permitting red tape has created bottlenecks that make it impossible to build the energy future families and businesses are counting on.

Real reform must include two things: Clean Water Act 401 reform and judicial review reform. Without them, activist states and pipeline-blocking lawsuits can continue delaying critical projects for years.

Congress has a narrow opportunity to get this right, by delivering real permitting reform that gets America building again. Learn more at [RealPermitReform.com](https://RealPermitReform.com).

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#### NEW JOINT FUNDRAISERS

Team Paxton (Ken Paxton for Senate, Lone Star Liberty PAC, NRSC, Republican Party of Texas, Texas First Leadership PAC)

#### NEW PACS

Asian American Political Action Committee - AAPAC (PAC)

Josh Turek Victory Fund (PAC)

Lead With Facts PAC (Leadership PAC: **Jasmine Clark**)

#### NEW LOBBYING REGISTRATIONS

Anchor & Arrow LLC: Trackonomy Systems, Inc.

Brown & Associates Government Relations: Bi-State Development Agency

Brown & Associates Government Relations: Lambert-St. Louis International Airport

Capitol Tax Partners, LLP: Millennium Management, LLC

Continental Strategy, LLC: C&C North American Inc. DBA Cosentino North America

Continental Strategy, LLC: Citex USA LLC

Continental Strategy, LLC: Constellation Brands, Inc.

Continental Strategy, LLC: Grupo Estrella Holdings, S.A.

Crossroads Strategies, LLC: Blood Cancer United, Inc. FKA Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, Inc. (LLS)

Holland & Knight LLP: Edgescale AI, Inc.

LMH Strategic Solutions: University of Louisville Health

Mission Strategies LLC (Energy): REC Silicon

NexusOne Consulting: Emad El Said Youssef Saad El-Galada through Bolt Capital, LP

Valiant Strategies LLC: Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP OBO Veterans Guardian VA Claim Consulting LLC

#### NEW LOBBYING TERMINATIONS

Desimone Consulting, LLC: City of Fife, WA

Reliant Government Relations, LLC: Heating, Air-Conditioning, & Refrigeration Distributors International

Bracy Tucker Brown & Valanzano DBA Brown & Associates: City of St. Louis

The Ethiopian World Federation, Inc.: The Ethiopian World Federation, Inc.

Nathan Morrison: Control AI US, Inc.

Altrius Group, LLC: AUTM

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