

**To:** Jackson, Ryan[jackson.ryan@epa.gov]  
**From:** Morning Score  
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**Subject:** POLITICO's Morning Score: House Democrats tread lightly into 2018 primaries — Ohio Democrats 'wait and see' amid Cordray rumors — Messer jumps into Indiana Senate race

By Elena Schneider | 07/27/2017 10:00 AM EDT

*With Kevin Robillard and Zach Montellaro*

*The following newsletter is an abridged version of Campaign Pro's Morning Score. For an earlier morning read on exponentially more races - and for a more comprehensive aggregation of the day's most important campaign news - sign up for Campaign Pro today. (<http://www.politicopro.com/proinfo>)*

**A LIGHT TOUCH - "House Democrats take cautious approach to 2018 primaries," by Campaign Pro's Elena Schneider:** "The DCCC has stated its policy on primaries over and over: The committee "reserves the right" to get involved in them. So far, though, House Democratic leaders have adopted a more hands-off approach than in years past as hundreds of candidates across the country flood into potential battleground races. Operatives said that House Democrats' somewhat laissez-faire attitude is explained by the 'embarrassment of riches' when it comes to the volume of candidates interested in running this cycle, said John Lapp, a Democratic media strategist and former DCCC executive director. ...The committee still has favorites in some seats - and may signal more in the future. DCCC Chairman [Ben Ray Lujan](#) donated to six challengers in the first half of 2017 via his leadership PAC, in an array of districts with unusual primaries, long-shot contenders or particularly notable candidates. But strategists and other observers say the effort to clear primary fields and anoint nominees has been much less aggressive in the early stages of the 2018 election cycle than in past years." [Full story.](#)

**THE WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART - "Ohio Democrats 'wait and see' amid Cordray rumors," by Campaign Pro's Daniel Strauss:** [Full story.](#)

**GETTING IN - Messer jumps into Indiana Senate race:** Rep. Luke Messer jumped into Indiana's Senate race on Wednesday, beating fellow Rep. Todd Rokita to the punch for the GOP primary to take on vulnerable Democratic Sen. Joe Donnelly. Messer's short Twitter missive - "We're in!" - didn't include the traditional announcement video or many details, indicating there's probably more to come at Messer's annual family BBQ on August 12. But Messer did reveal his slogan: "I Like Luke."

**- The Rokita campaign is working hard to claim the momentum.** They released a poll hours after Messer's entrance into the race showing Rokita leading him 28 percent to 20 percent in a head-to-head matchup, and with a similar lead among a larger field. (Messer had released polling last week showing the pair tied.) And that poll comes a day after a memo from Rokita general consultant Tim Edson arguing Messer is overly reliant on PAC money that will dry up not long after he enters a race against an incumbent Senator. And that memo came after news Rokita massively outraised Messer in the second quarter, which came after a series of hits on Messer's wife's high-paid legal work for an Indianapolis suburb and other stories highlighting Messer's

home in McLean, Va.

**GETTING IN, PART DEUX - Nicholson starts Wisconsin field:** Iraq and Afghanistan veteran and businessman Kevin Nicholson is the first Republican to enter the field to take on Democratic Sen. Tammy Baldwin after trucking heiress Nicole Schneider and Rep. Sean Duffy both opted against running. Nicholson has obvious appeals: He's a veteran with no voting record and graduate degrees from Harvard and Dartmouth. But he has one obvious negative: He was president of the College Democrats of America and spoke at the 2000 Democratic National Convention.

**- Nicholson's announcement video, which covers his impressive biography, hints at how he'll handle the College Democrat attacks.** "In my younger days, I was a Democrat. I used to do nothing and know everything," he says in the 3-minute long video. "But since then, we've had three kids, fought in two wars and worked in businesses around the world. And after you've been hit in the face with that much reality, you can not help but become a strong conservative." **Watch it [here](#).**

**- Will the Club for Growth endorse Nicholson?** The group issued a statement "welcoming" him to the race. Nicholson already has a super PAC seeded with \$3.5 million from GOP superdonor Richard Uihlein, and the Club could provide additional cash for a primary. "This is the most important development of today," an advisor close to Nicholson said. "Dick Uihlein and the Club for Growth in a primary are a force that alone can match any self-funder dollar for dollar." It's worth noting Uihlein has donated to the Club for Growth in the past. The self-funder would presumably be 2012 GOP primary runner-up Eric Hovde. State Sen. Leah Vukmir is also considering the race, and [has already questioned](#) Nicholson's conservatism..

**BAWITDABA - Kid Rock launches voter registration nonprofit, says he's still exploring Senate bid:** Kid Rock is continuing to look at a Senate bid in his home state of Michigan, he wrote in a post that went up at midnight, and is starting a voter registration nonprofit in the meantime. "The one thing I've seen over and over is that although people are unhappy with the government, too few are even registered to vote or do anything about it," he wrote. "We have over a year left until an actual election, so my first order of business is to get people engaged and registered to vote while continuing to put out my ideas on ways to help working class people in Michigan and America all while still calling out these jackass lawyers who call themselves politicians." But he also notes Democrats "are 'shattin' in their pantaloons' right now" and says he'll hold a press conference sometime in the next six weeks to discuss a potential bid. **[Read more](#).**

**Days until the 2017 election: 102.**

**Days until the 2018 election: 466.**

Thanks for joining us. You can email tips to the Campaign Pro team at [sbland@politico.com](mailto:sbland@politico.com), [eschneider@politico.com](mailto:eschneider@politico.com), [krobillard@politico.com](mailto:krobillard@politico.com), [dstrauss@politico.com](mailto:dstrauss@politico.com) and [mseverns@politico.com](mailto:mseverns@politico.com).

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**ON THE HILL - "'Skinny' Obamacare repeal still lacks votes to pass," by POLITICO's Burgess Everett, Jennifer Haberkorn and Seung Min Kim:** "Even a bare-bones repeal of Obamacare is no sure thing in the Senate. A handful of key Republican senators who had spurned earlier overtures from GOP leadership endorsed the latest plan to gut Obamacare's individual and employer coverage mandates and its medical device tax. But several centrists said they're undecided on the so-called skinny repeal, leaving the GOP in limbo through at least the end of the week." [Full story.](#)

- **"Heller defends health care vote amid Democratic attacks," via POLITICO's Burgess Everett:** "Democrats are escalating their attacks on Nevada GOP Sen. [Dean Heller](#) for voting to open debate on Obamacare repeal and signaling support for a trimmed-down repeal bill. But Heller, who faces a tough reelection contest next year, says he is at peace with his decisions. ...In an interview on Wednesday, Heller said he is satisfied with how he has handled the grueling health care debate, which includes standing with Gov. Brian Sandoval to lash proposed cuts to Medicaid, getting needled by President Donald Trump in front of other colleagues and then aiding Senate Majority Leader [Mitch McConnell](#) in moving forward on the repeal effort." [Full story.](#)

**DAILY WAR EAGLE - Not gonna happen, Mo:** An odd turn in the Alabama senate race: Rep. Mo Brooks said he'd withdraw from the race-if everyone else did so too, so that the beleaguered Jeff Sessions could get his old seat back. Brooks, in a statement: "If all Republican candidates collectively agree to simultaneously withdraw from this race, then we clear the way for the Republican Party of Alabama to nominate Jeff Sessions to be the Republican nominee for the December 12, 2017 general election. He can return to the Senate where he has served us so well. President can then appoint whomever he wants as Attorney General." He also called the president's treatment of Sessions a "public waterboarding of one of the great people Alabama has ever produced." [Full story.](#)

- **Brooks goes after Trump in radio interview:** In a radio interview this morning, Brooks previewed his pro-Sessions stance and criticized President Donald Trump. He immediately pronounced he was "disappointed and chagrined with what what's happening with Jeff Sessions and President Trump right now." Asked about his pre-election criticisms of Trump, Brooks declares: "It looks like a lot of the reservations I had are turning out to be prophetic." He later says Trump hasn't been helpful during the Obamacare repeal process, and refuses to say he has confidence in the president. [Listen here.](#)

**OOPS - "Watchdogs Say Cuomo Is Skirting Campaign Finance Rules," by The New York Times' Brian Rosenthal:** "At the end of a video promoting Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's immigration policies, a disclaimer noted the advertisement's funding source: an obscure anti-discrimination group called New Yorkers United Together. The fledgling group, which has financed only the one online video, claims it has no ties to any politician. Two of the group's co-founders said in interviews that the governor had nothing to do with the ad, other than agreeing to appear in it alongside several celebrities. But a closer examination shows otherwise. ... To

government watchdogs, the connections are evidence that Mr. Cuomo is again skirting campaign finance rules by using a secretive nonprofit to advance his agenda." [Full story.](#)

**FROM THE COURTROOM - "Lawyers for Brady, rival rebut claims of illegal campaign payoff,"** by **The Philadelphia Inquirer's Jeremy Roebuck, Chris Brennan and Tricia L. Nadolny:** "U.S. Rep. Robert Brady's lawyer pushed back Wednesday against federal prosecutors' claims that the congressman secretly paid a political rival \$90,000 to drop a bid to unseat him in the 2012 Democratic primary. Scoffing at the depiction of the money as a covert payoff, attorney James Eisenhower said that the funds were intended in part to acquire exclusive rights to valuable polling data from the primary challenger, Municipal Court Judge Jimmie Moore." [Full story.](#)

**PELOSI, PELOSI, PELOSI - "Voter by voter, GOP super PAC tries to separate the party from Trump,"** by **The Washington Post's Dave Weigel:** "...The CLF's multimillion-dollar campaign, unfolding this year in 20 targeted districts and expanding next year to 30, is an ambitious bet that the Republican House majority can be spared from midterm backlash over President Trump. If it works, each endangered Republican will be reintroduced to voters as a post-partisan who delivers on their key issues; each Democratic challenger will be framed as a vote for Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) to snatch back the speaker's gavel while empowering an anti-Trump 'resistance' that only wants to wreck the country." [Full story.](#)

**ICYMI - Facebook donates \$500,000 to 'secure elections' from meddling, via POLITICO's Nancy Scola:** "Facebook is contributing half a million dollars to getting off the ground a new Harvard project aimed at combating digital interference in democratic elections, [the tech company said today.](#)" [Full story.](#)

**CODA - QUOTE OF THE DAY:** "We don't comment on casting." - An ABC spokeswoman, asked to comment on the possibility that "Dancing with the Stars" is trying to recruit former press secretary Sean Spicer, [POLITICO](#) reported.

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