

Study up! 2026 a chance to revamp Iowa GOP for conservatives



Good morning! This has been a busy week in Iowa Republican politics and some shuffling remains to be seen.

With Sen. Joni Ernst announcing she will not seek a third term — which we told you would be the case months ago — Congresswoman Ashley Hinson announced her candidacy for U.S. Senate just hours later — which we also told you would be the case months ago.

Now the dominoes will continue to fall. It is expected that State Rep. Shannon Lundgren will throw her hat in the race for Iowa's Second Congressional District. A former state representative will also be getting in the race. I wouldn't be shocked to see a few others get in the mix for that seat.

With an already competitive primary for Governor, Iowa Republican primary voters have significant tasks in front of them.

I would argue the 2026 primary election provides a real opportunity for a conservative reset of the Iowa GOP. However, the odds of this actually coming to fruition are extremely low.

It appears the campaign strategy for the establishment candidates will be to put every photo they've ever taken with President Trump on social media and their campaign literature. They're going to tell us how they've stood shoulder to shoulder with President Trump and been a fighter with President Trump.

The reality is that just isn't true. It isn't.

They all certified Biden's "win" in 2020. None of them, to my knowledge, had Trump's back or "MAGA's" back on Jan. 7, 2021 — you know, when it sorta mattered most. None of them endorsed President Trump before the Iowa Caucus in 2024.

In fact, on the eve of the Iowa Caucus, Hinson was tweeting about joining [Nikki Haley](#) to rally folks to get out and caucus on Monday. Randy Feenstra said he would endorse someone in the Iowa Caucus, but that endorsement was never delivered. Why? I would speculate it is because the writing was on the wall — Trump was going to win the caucus despite what the Republican establishment hoped.

As soon as the caucus was over and Trump showed he had overcome everything from his first term and then some, all the sudden Iowa's GOP establishment rallied around Trump.

I mean, it was Feb. 3, 2021, when Hinson proudly supported Liz Cheney for Conference Chair after Cheney voted to impeach President Trump. To be fair, at least Hinson was public about her vote — Feenstra still hasn't answered whether he supported Cheney retaining her leadership position.

Now, let me be clear, when I vote for candidates, loyalty to President Trump and MAGA isn't at the top of my checklist. I prefer to be guided by voting records. The best way to predict how someone will serve as a representative is to examine how someone has already served as a representative.

And while they can say all the right things on the campaign trail and maybe even show you a picture of them and President Trump together, those things don't matter nearly as much as their voting record.

Now, this newsletter is lengthy enough, I won't get into the voting records today — I mean, we sort of have 9 more months to go through that stuff. But I will say this.

If a Republican is running in a primary and has received money from the Iowa State Education Association (Teachers' Union), that is probably a strong indicator to look for another candidate. If a Republican is running in a primary for Congress and, while serving in the Iowa House, signed onto an amendment that would have killed the bill removing gender identity from the civil rights code, that is probably a strong indicator to look for another candidate. If a Republican is running in a primary for US Senate and had a score from Heritage Action of 59 in Congress when a Democrat was President, well, that is probably a strong indicator to consider another choice.

And just because these folks tell you today that they want to fight with and for President Trump, you should ask where they were during the 2020 Election. You should ask where their support was on Jan. 7, 2021. You should ask where it was when they supported Liz Cheney for leadership. You should ask — well, hopefully by now you get the point.

Republican primary voters have to figure out what they want to do in 2026. Do they want to be voters who vote for the establishment candidate who has already let them down multiple times or do they want to take a new route of voting for someone who may actually stick to the platform and represent them?

Look, some people reading this may well be establishment Republicans. And that's fine. They don't typically criticize Republicans for folding anyway.

But I know some who consider themselves "MAGA" or conservative. And if that's the case, it should take a whole lot more than a picture with Donald Trump and a catchy slogan to earn your vote.

If you really care whether a candidate is “MAGA,” ask yourself first what it means to be “MAGA.” Then ask when has this person demonstrated being “MAGA” when it was difficult. It’s easy to be “MAGA” right now as a Republican. Two years ago, not so much. Four years ago, not so much.

If they weren’t “MAGA” when it was hard, they’re probably not really “MAGA” right now. They just have to appear to be “MAGA” to get support from Trump voters. The question is are we so simple-minded that we’ll fall for it?

And again, I’m not even saying being “MAGA” matters more than someone’s voting record. This is intended for those who will simply vote for whoever they believe is most “MAGA” and whoever is endorsed by President Trump.

Primary voters need to do their homework. They need to study the records of these candidates. And they have to decide if they’re willing to bet on the same politicians who have let them down so many times before.

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