



# Dispatch Weekly

Hello and happy Saturday. We always knew the 2026 midterms would be dramatic: The Republicans have razor-thin margins in both chambers of Congress, the party in power typically fares poorly, and President Donald Trump has had steadily declining approval ratings. We've seen states—red and blue—rush to redraw their congressional maps in order to influence the makeup of the House of Representatives. But the fate of the Senate potentially hinging on a scandal-ridden Democratic candidate in Maine may not have been on our bingo card.

The group of Senate seats up for election favors Republicans keeping control of the chamber, where they currently have a 53-47 majority. But polling increasingly suggests Democrats could earn a majority. Texas, Iowa, North Carolina, and Ohio are all vulnerable seats for the GOP. Even if the ethically challenged, Trump-endorsed Republican state Attorney General Ken Paxton defeats James Talarico in Texas, there are paths to Democrats winning. Which brings us to Maine, where progressive upstart Graham Platner is poised to win next week's Democratic primary.

Platner declared his candidacy last August, but by October he was facing scrutiny over past comments he'd made online and dealing with the revelation that he'd gotten a tattoo that resembled an insignia used by the SS during World War II. Turns out the Nazi tattoo, which Platner covered up, was just the beginning.

A week ago, the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* both reported that Graham's wife had told campaign aides that he had “sexting” relationships with up to a dozen women, and the *WSJ* reported that he had an active profile on Kik, a private messaging app “widely used for sexual encounters.”

This created a bit of a pickle for Democrats, even before the *New York Times* reported on Thursday that former girlfriends of Platner described him as being “demeaning to women and, in at least one case, even physically threatening.” One ex also claimed that Platner knew his tattoo was a Nazi symbol, despite his

protestations throughout his campaign that he was unaware. What now? Do Democrats stand behind such a morally challenged candidate in hopes of winning the Senate, or do they risk enduring two more years of a GOP majority carrying out Donald Trump's agenda?

In **Boiling Frogs**, Nick [wrote](#) that we've seen this show before. He recalls Michael Anton's 2016 essay, "The Flight 93 Election," noting that it "remains the supreme statement of negative partisanship in modern American politics, a playbook Republicans have since followed to rationalize every form of depravity the president can muster. Nothing that our candidate has done or will do is so terrible, the thinking goes, that it would justify empowering the other party to carry out its existential threat against America." He calls the essay loathsome, but he also sympathizes with Democrats:

If the election were tight locally and nationally, I would feel pulled morally to vote for the Democrat. The difference between Anton's "Flight 93" fantasy and our present reality is that the lunatic at the controls *really is* willing to crash this plane, especially as his senescence deepens. He's trying to put his face on the money. He's turning the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence into a political rally. He treats trade policy as a royal prerogative, declares major wars without congressional input, has deputized the Justice Department to persecute his enemies, and impugns any election result that reflects badly on him as illegitimate.

In the Wednesday **G-File**, Jonah Goldberg had his own thoughts about choosing the "lesser of two evils." He [wrote](#):

There are two problems with supporting the lesser of two evils. The first is you're still supporting evil. ...

The second problem is that in an era where all notions of small-r republican virtue elicit contempt from anyone who finds virtue inconvenient to their pursuit of power, power becomes the measure of virtue. How many people who said Trump was the lesser evil a decade ago "evolved" to believe that Trump was the avatar of all that is good? His bad character was once a regrettable problem that was outweighed by the need to defeat Hillary Clinton. In short order, the definition of good character was rewritten to fit Trump. The same thing is happening before our eyes with Graham Platner, and I'm sure we'll get there with Paxton.

Kevin Williamson, meanwhile, took apart the argument from the left that Platner merely is "not perfect." He [wrote](#):

To say that Platner "isn't perfect" is to say nothing at all. None of us is perfect. To say that a man is not perfect is akin to saying he is not a giraffe or a Tiffany lampshade. Platner is a man with an SS tattoo and fidelity problems who cannot manage to give a forthright account of either these or many other legitimate concerns about his character and his candidacy. It is not that Graham Platner is

not perfect—it is that he is positively bad, not in a merely private sense as some apologists would have it but in the sense of being a bad sort of person to endow with significant political power. Private morality and civic virtue are not the same thing (Cato the Younger was a drunk) but there is a great deal of overlap in that Venn diagram.

The standard for public men is not *perfection*. To write and speak and argue as though it were is simply a cheap and cowardly rhetorical dodge, one that should always and everywhere be treated with the contempt it deserves.

If you need a palate cleanser after that, we had some really great pieces this week. John McCormack interviewed former Sen. Ben Sasse, who is battling cancer and was given months to live six months ago, about how his family and faith are helping carry him through his fight. And as we get closer to the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, Yuval Levin looks at whether the American experiment is legitimate. Both are highlighted below. Thanks for reading, and have a great weekend.