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Beleaguered Democrats Eye 2028 With Podcasts, Red-State Rallies

- Schumer's deal to avert shutdown highlights intraparty rifts
- Newsom hosts Kirk, Bannon on podcast, raising progressive ire

By Akayla Gardner

(Bloomberg) -- Gavin Newsom is talking to MAGA darlings. Wes Moore is helping fired federal workers find new jobs. Gretchen Whitmer is meeting with the president to talk about tariffs.

The 2028 presidential election is more than three years away, yet a field of Democratic hopefuls is already angling for the opportunity to recapture the White House for their party.

From high-profile governors to progressive icons in Congress, the contenders are trying to fire up the demoralized party faithful still recovering from former Vice President Kamala Harris' loss to Donald Trump in November – and win over swing voters starting to feel burned by the new administration's policies.



61% of Americans said in February they'd seen food prices rise in the previous month, according to a Harris poll conducted for Bloomberg News.

While a slumping stock market, Trump's escalating trade war and worry that inflation will make a comeback have given Democrats an opening on the economy, the party remains split over the causes of its electoral thrashing in 2024 – and how best to use the limited power it has.

Those divisions were on display after Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and a small band of Democrats helped

avert a government shutdown on Friday by helping to advance a Republican funding bill.

Schumer's decision angered progressives and went against calls from Newsom and other potential 2028 candidates like Illinois Governor JB Pritzker to force the GOP, which holds a thin majority, to compromise.

Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro, who is also widely expected to seek the Democratic nomination in 2028, said on HBO's *Real Time With Bill Maher* on Friday that he would have preferred that Schumer use his leverage to win more concessions from Republicans.

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Some Democratic insiders are urging the party to stay focused on economic issues. What was once a source of strength for Trump has started to look shakier, with consumer sentiment sinking to the lowest level since 2022, according to data released Friday.

"The economy and inflation are what got him elected, and they are what are damaging his popularity right now," said Dan Pfeiffer, who was a senior adviser to former President Barack Obama and now writes a newsletter that's widely read in Democratic circles.

Some 61% of Americans said they'd seen food prices rise in the past month, according to a February Harris poll conducted for Bloomberg News. About four in ten respondents said they felt stressed or anxious about the economy, and nearly 60% said they believe tariffs will lead to higher prices.

Reaching Right

To try to connect with disillusioned Trump voters, some Democrats are reaching across the cultural rift between liberals and conservatives. And none has done that more visibly – or with greater controversy – than Newsom.



Gavin Newsom

In February, the California governor launched a podcast, *This Is Gavin Newsom*, that has had conservative influencer Charlie Kirk and former Trump adviser Steve Bannon as guests. Podcasts were widely credited with helping turn voters – especially young men – toward Trump.

Newsom's podcast now appears to be drawing on some of that same energy to build buzz for the two-term governor. On Friday, his show climbed to sixth among Apple Podcasts' top shows, just behind *The Joe Rogan Experience*.

Newsom's engagement with the right has annoyed some in his party, who say that he isn't confronting his guests over views that they see as problematic.

California Democratic Congressman Ro Khanna, who is also seen as a possible 2028 contender, chided Newsom for not pushing back on Kirk's past comments on race, including attacks on American civil-rights icon Martin Luther King Jr.

"Dialogue doesn't mean acquiescence in statements that have been deeply concerning," said Khanna.

Newsom adviser Lindsey Cobia called Khanna's criticism "ridiculous," adding that the governor had challenged both Kirk and Bannon on the mass firings of federal workers, book bans and tax cuts.

State Stances

Some Democratic governors whose residents and state economies are most exposed to Trump administration policies are taking a pragmatic approach to dealing with the president.

Whitmer, the Michigan governor, met with Trump at the White House last week to discuss defense investments, environmental issues and tariffs. Michigan, home base of the US auto industry, is especially sensitive to Trump's trade policies. Whitmer expressed gratitude for the meeting.



Gretchen Whitmer

In Maryland, where tens of thousands of federal workers live in suburbs of Washington, Moore, the state's governor, has started a campaign to help place federal employees who have lost their jobs amid recent cutbacks in state-government roles and private-sector jobs. A spokesperson for Moore declined to comment.

At the annual Gridiron Club dinner in Washington on Saturday, Moore acknowledged his ambitions for higher office while making jokes that jabbed at Trump.



J.B. Pritzker during the Democratic National Convention in 2024.

Elsewhere, Pritzker has been among the most combative governors, assailing the Trump administration's approach to deporting migrants. Chicago has been a focal point of Trump's crackdown on immigration.

Pritzker's Chief of Staff Anne Caprara criticized Democrats for playing it safe.

"The fight going on in the Democratic Party right now is not between hard left, left and moderate," Caprara wrote on Bluesky. "It's between those who want to fight and those who want to cave."



Tim Walz

Other Democrats are taking their pitch to Trump country in person. Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, Harris' running mate, visited House districts under Republican control in Iowa and Nebraska last week.

Khanna also plans to stump in red districts in California after his former boss, Senator Bernie Sanders, held well-attended rallies across the Midwest. Sanders and New York Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez are heading West to campaign in other competitive districts.

"The stakes for the American people are too high to sit out any race or to wait until presidential election season to invest in our party," Democratic National Committee Chair Ken Martin said in a statement. Martin said the DNC is investing heavily in state party organizing and get-out-the-vote efforts nationwide.



Pete Buttigieg

Former Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said on Thursday that he won't run for statewide office in Michigan, and remains "intensely focused" on an alternative to Trump. His decision paves the way for a future White House run, according to a person familiar with his thinking.

'Start Doing Something'

While there is hardly unanimity among Democrats, some consultants said that it's too early to prejudge the effectiveness of any particular approach to winning back voters.

"Let's just get people out there. Let's start doing something. Let's see what actually works, and then we can double down on that," said Pfeiffer.



Kamala Harris tours a fire-damaged neighborhood with Los Angeles County officials.

Since her loss to Trump, Harris has mostly flown under the radar of national politics. She has made public appearances in her home state of California, where she hasn't ruled out a run for governor to replace Newsom, who is term-limited.

At the NAACP Image Awards in February, Harris urged the audience of mostly Black Americans "to actively participate in the fight for America's future."

"This chapter will be written not simply by whoever occupies the Oval Office, nor by the wealthiest among us," she said. "The American story will be written by you, written by us, by we, the people."

Harris will decide by summer if she will run for governor, still keeping her options open, according to a person familiar with the matter. Donors have inquired about how to support her next move, the person said.

Pfeiffer, who spoke at a recent House Democratic retreat in Virginia, cautioned against making assumptions about the next presidential nominee, pointing back to suggestions in 2008 that Democrats needed a moderate from a red state to win the presidency.

Instead, the US elected "Barack Hussein Obama from the south side of Chicago," he said. Whatever Democrats think they know now about the perfect candidate for 2028 "is almost certainly wrong."

--With assistance from Josh Wingrove and David Welch.

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