

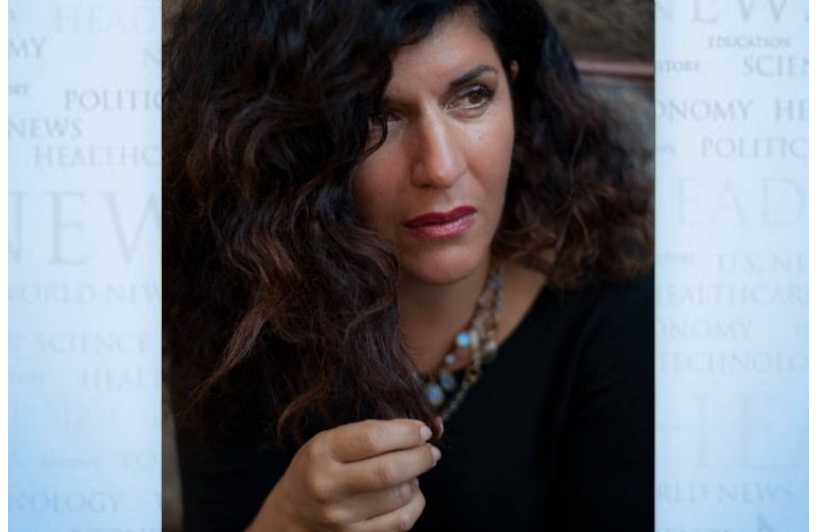


Written by [Salena Zito](#) on October 31, 2023

Is Abortion the Reason Democrats Are Heavily Investing in the Mississippi Governor's Race?

National Democrats, flush with cash and looking for a narrative showing their party can retake the South from a near 20-year Republican dominance, are pulling out all the stops to try to create a competitive Mississippi governors' race between incumbent Gov. Tate Reeves, R-Miss., and Democrat Brandon Presley.

In doing so, they want to make up for what they failed to accomplish in the Georgia rematch between Gov. Brian Kemp, R-Ga., and Democrat Stacey Abrams last November.



Salena Zito

The Washington-based Democratic Governors Association has dumped an eye-popping amount, nearly \$4 million, into a seat they haven't held in 20 years, almost twice as much as it invested when Reeves ran four years ago against Democrat Jim Hood, then the state's attorney general. Reeves won then by 5 percentage points.

Earlier this month, third-party candidate Gwendolyn Gray dropped out, endorsing Presley as she exited. Her announcement was made too late for her name to be stricken from the ballot.

The last Democrat to hold the governor's office was Ronnie Musgrove in 2000, who lost his reelection bid four years later to Haley Barbour.

The DGA leaked its internal polling numbers to a Mississippi blog on Monday, showing a closer-than-expected race with neither man hitting the 50% mark needed to avoid a runoff.

The DGA isn't the only entity spending in Mississippi: National unions have spent another \$400,000 as well as cash coming from several different left-leaning groups giving Presley the ability to claim he's raised more than any other Democratic candidate for any office in Mississippi history.

Democrats aren't just spending here. Nationally known ones such as Abrams are endorsing Presley or even, in the case of Gov. Gavin Newsom, D-Calif., making campaign visits. It remains unclear, though, if national Democrats understand the Democrat voters here, both black and white. In Georgia, more of the black voters are suburban and college educated than the Mississippi black voters, who are more often rural and more religious. While the Mississippi black voters tend to be liberal, they're not so liberal on guns and abortion, which makes both Abrams and Newsom an odd fit here.

So, why is big national progressive money caring about a race that doesn't have much of a chance in a state they've never cared about before? The answer is likely because Mississippi was at the heart of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, the June 2022 ruling in which the Supreme Court overturned the long-standing pro-abortion decision *Roe v. Wade*. Fuming Democrats want to punish the state and Reeves for their role in that decision.

It does not hurt that in a post-*Dobbs* world, Democrats can raise money for any race anywhere.



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Reeves is as conservative a governor as you can get, but he is also on a pragmatic streak on issues such as rewarding teachers by raising their salaries to the largest ever in the state that until last year had been among the lowest-paid public school teachers in the nation.

Reeves said when raising their pay that teachers deserved to be rewarded for going back during the pandemic and because the test scores in the state's schools were going up thanks to the implementation of Mississippi's stringent rule preventing third-grade students from moving to fourth if they aren't reading proficiently.

That rule, known as the "Mississippi Miracle," is credited for Mississippi students in the past few years rapidly closing the gap with the rest of the country.

As a result, Mississippi students' test scores reached an all-time high in 2022-2023 in mathematics, English language arts, science, and U.S. history.

Reeves's challenge in this race is that he is not the charismatic, larger-than-life Barbour or a master retail politician. He is instead that earnest guy who doesn't spin tales, slap you on the back, or wear cowboy boots on the stump. He is a grinder who figured out how Democrats in his state played and went right to it without once mustering an army of fellow Republicans to have his back, which in return doesn't enlist them to then go to war for him when the Democrats have come to town with bags of cash to take his job away.

What Reeves excels at is doing his best to make Mississippi better, not just on the education front but also in economic development. He has brought new companies here at a brisk pace, including the largest economic development project in the state's history in Lowndes County, where Steel Dynamics just broke ground on a \$2.5 billion Aluminum Dynamics facility that is expected to create 1,000 new jobs with an average salary of \$93,000.

Reeves's opponent, Presley, hails from rural Mississippi. He said in our interview in 2018 that he has voted for both former President Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton and was a "proud New Deal Democrat" in his roles as both a public service commissioner and mayor of his hometown of Nettleton, but he is pro-life and bragged about his independence. These are world views that differ deeply from the Washington Democrats, who are now giving a lot of money to a man they'd rarely agree with, in particular on abortion.

In his campaign this year, Reeves has frequently attacked not his opponent but President Joe Biden: "I've endorsed Donald Trump for President in 2024, and the day after this election is over, I'm going to be building his campaign in Mississippi, and if Brandon Presley were to win, he'd be running Biden's Mississippi campaign. I've been defending President Trump when we see these outrageous political prosecutions, and my opponent has been cheering them on."

In October 2019, Trump tweeted that he had given his "Complete & Total Endorsement" to Reeves weeks before he clinched the seat.

Salena Zito is a CNN political analyst, and a staff reporter and columnist for the Washington Examiner. She reaches the Everyman and Everywoman through shoe-leather journalism, traveling from Main Street to the beltway and all places in between. To find out more about Salena and read her past columns, please visit the Creators Syndicate webpage at www.creators.com.

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