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Venture capitalists rally behind AI moratorium

By CAITLIN OPRYSKO | 06/26/2025 06:13 PM EDT

With Daniel Lippman

ABOUT THAT AI MORATORIUM: Venture capitalists are throwing their weight behind language in the reconciliation bill that would freeze state and local enforcement of artificial intelligence regulations for a decade.

- “The current fragmented AI regulatory environment in the United States creates unnecessary challenges for startups, stifles innovation, and threatens our dominance in the industry,” **Bobby Franklin**, president and chief executive of the **National Venture Capital Association**, wrote in a letter to Senate Majority Leader **John Thune** today.
- “With over 1,000 AI-related bills across state legislatures, startups and investors struggle to navigate conflicting mandates and legal uncertainty,” Franklin continued, warning that

navigating the regulatory patchwork “is not only costly but poses existential risks” for fledgling companies.

— Tech players of all sizes have cheered the AI moratorium’s inclusion in the reconciliation package, warning that the absence of such a freeze could allow China to overtake the U.S. in the sector. But the language has deeply divided Republicans like Sen. **Marsha Blackburn** (R-Tenn.) and Rep. **Marjorie Taylor Green** (R-Ga.) who want it stripped out over concerns about tying the hands of local policymakers for a decade in the absence of federal AI regulations.

— Former White House press secretary **Sarah Huckabee Sanders**, who’s now governor of Arkansas, denounced the moratorium in an op-ed in **The Washington Post** today.

— The provision has been rewritten once by Senate Commerce Chair **Ted Cruz** (R-Texas) in order to comply with the Byrd rule, and his Democratic counterpart **Maria Cantwell** said today that the parliamentarian is requesting further tweaks in order to remain in the bill, per **POLITICO’s Anthony Adragna**.

HOUSE T&I STAFF DIRECTOR HEADS TO K STREET: Jack Ruddy has left the Hill after nearly a decade and a half to join **AxAdvocacy** as senior vice president of government relations. Ruddy is a longtime aide to House Transportation and Infrastructure Chair **Sam Graves** (R-Mo.), and has been serving for the past six years as the GOP staff director for the panel.

— “No one understands the inner workings of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee better than Jack Ruddy,” Graves said in a statement provided by the firm.

— AxAdvocacy represents a growing roster of clients in the transportation and infrastructure world, including **Delta, Hughes Aerospace Corporation, WISPR Systems, BR Companies, Boyd, Douglas Development, Netlease** and **Public Properties**.

Happy Thursday and welcome to PI. It seems PI’s invitation to **Jeff Bezos’** Italian wedding extravaganza got lost in the mail, but you can make sure your lobbying scoops don’t: Add me on **Signal** at caitlinoprysko.17, email me at coprysko@politico.com, and be sure to follow me on **X**: @caitlinoprysko.

MORE COLLEGES FLOCKING TO K STREET: The Trump administration’s war on higher education continues to translate into big business for K Street. Trump’s own alma mater, the **University of Pennsylvania**, brought on a new team of lobbyists from **BGR**

Group that includes Trump ally (and Pennsylvania native) **David Urban** amid the university's showdown with Trump over federal funding.

— BGR Group began working for UPenn's trustees in May to "provide strategic counsel and advocate on issues related to higher education and research appropriations," according to a disclosure filing.

— In addition to facing off with the Trump administration over its federal funding, Penn would face a massive tax hike on its endowment under the House-passed reconciliation bill. The school would still face a tax increase — albeit a smaller one — under the Senate's version of the bill.

— BGR has also registered to lobby for the **University of Chicago**. Maine's **Bowdoin College**, which like Penn and (eventually) the University of Chicago would also face an endowment tax hike under either version of the reconciliation bill, brought on **Cornerstone Government Affairs** at the beginning of May, according to a disclosure filing.

MORE NEW BUSINESS: BGR Group has filed a slew of new lobbying registrations, including for U.S.-based stablecoin issuer **Circle**, finance giant **Mastercard** and plumbing manufacturer **Kohler**.

— And **Bria**, which has sought to portray itself as a more ethical alternative than the other AI companies dominating the sector — and is the rare AI developer opposed to the reconciliation bill's state moratorium — hired its first federal lobbyists at **Thorsen French Advocacy** to work on AI policy issues.

HOW THE NYC MAYORAL RACE IS PLAYING ON K STREET: Zohran

Mamdani's triumph in the Democratic primary for New York City mayor on Tuesday sent shockwaves through the financial sector in lower Manhattan and the political world writ large. But the state assemblymember and 33-year-old democratic socialist's defeat of former Gov. **Andrew Cuomo** is also trickling down to K Street.

— "While the New York City Council has only a few democratic socialist members, which may keep Mamdani from pursuing or accomplishing each of his policy goals, or may moderate their implementations, many of his policy goals are shared by broader Democratic coalitions," **Michael Mallon**, a senior associate in the New York office of **Hogan Lovells**, wrote in a memo to clients Wednesday.

— The memo breaks down some of Mamdani’s key policy proposals and the feasibility of his plans to finance them, in addition to handicapping his chances of winning the general election, which isn’t a sure thing.

— “We are getting a ton of questions from clients about this,” **Aaron Cutler**, who leads the government relations and public affairs practice at **Hogan Lovells**, told PI in an email. Cutler said the firm’s heard from “lots of concerned clients” with whom the firm has been talking through the realities of New York City governance versus campaign rhetoric.

HOW TO LOBBY THE UNLOBBYABLE: Senate parliamentarian **Elizabeth MacDonough** is one of the most powerful people in Washington right now as she serves as the arbiter of what is and isn’t allowed to remain in the GOP megabill under the rules of reconciliation. But “the industry built on access has little influence” with MacDonough, who **NOTUS’ Taylor Giorno** writes is “one of the rare players on Capitol Hill that refuses to meet with lobbyists.”

— “While lobbyists can’t directly lobby the parliamentarian, several said they are trying to backchannel their demands through the process. Their targets include Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, a tax on profits from third-party litigation funding and a 10-year moratorium on new state artificial intelligence regulations.”

— Lobbyists can try to game the system somewhat by “helping educate the staff and give them the ammunition to make the best arguments to their boss, for the parliamentarian,” said **Holland & Knight’s Rich Gold**. “We insert ourselves into the process by supplying evidence and arguments and detail to the minority, if they wish to use it, for including in their memo and their arguments to the parl,” another Democratic lobbyist told NOTUS.

— But MacDonough has already moved to strike key portions of the reconciliation package — including today when she axed the Senate GOP’s politically contentious plan to lower Medicaid costs by cracking down on a state provider tax, per **POLITICO’s Meredith Lee Hill, Robert King** and **Jordain Carney**. That triggered calls for MacDonough’s ouster and prompted a pledge from Thune not to overrule her.

FLYING IN: As the haggling continues on Republicans’ “big beautiful bill,” more than 75 teen advocates from all over the country are in town for the **Cystic Fibrosis Foundation’s** annual teen fly-in, which will focus on lobbying against Medicaid cuts in the package. The participants include nearly three dozen teenagers with cystic fibrosis, who will meet with staff from key Hill offices, including Sens. **Thom Tillis** (R-N.C.), **Ted**

Budd (R-N.C.), **Shelley Moore Capito** (R-W.Va.), **Jim Justice** (R-W.Va.) and **Mike Lee** (R-Utah).

NOT EVERYWHERE’S UNTOUCHABLE FOR K STREET: Over at HHS, Secretary **Robert F. Kennedy Jr.** might be wishing the agency he leads would take a leaf out of MacDonough’s book: Despite railing against “corporate capture” of federal health and nutrition policy, “health care lobbyists, regulatory experts and advocates for reduced industry involvement all told” NOTUS’ **Margaret Manto** that “so far, Kennedy’s words don’t match his actions.”

— “Since ascending to the top of the U.S. public health system, Kennedy has made grand gestures towards his supposed goal of clamping down on corporate influence at the Department of Health and Human Services.”

— “He’s held press conferences to tout agreements made with food producers to end the use of certain synthetic food dyes and with insurance companies to speed up the prior authorization process, both of which companies have lobbied against for years.

— “But these agreements have all been entirely voluntary. In the case of the food dye announcement, that was a direct result of industry influence, said one lobbyist granted anonymity to speak frankly. ‘Their biggest win was not real,’ the lobbyist said.”

BLASE PRESSED ON PPP LOAN: Rep. **Bonnie Watson Coleman** (D-N.J.) evidently reads PI because on Wednesday she asked **Brian Blase**, president of the **Paragon Health Institute**, about our reporting on him receiving a PPP loan that he didn’t repay, Daniel reports.

— In a House Budget Committee hearing about Medicaid reform, Watson Coleman sharply questioned Blase about the loan for **Blase Policy Strategies LLC** and why he didn’t pay it back. Blase, a prominent Republican advocate of Medicaid cuts, told her the loan had been forgiven since it was part of the PPP program (in line with most PPP loans). She also asked him about his purchase of a nearly \$700,000 house soon after getting the loan, leading Blase to say it was because of his family moving.

SPOTTED last night at the home of **Jim Clyburn** chief of staff **Yebbie Watkins** for a fundraiser benefitting **Haley Stevens’** Michigan Senate campaign, per a tipster: Reps. **Troy Carter** (D-La.) **Gabe Amo** (D-R.I.) Stevens (D-Mich.) and Clyburn (D-S.C.); **Michael Hacker** of **TikTok**, **Jake Perry** of **Jake Perry + Partners**, **Joyce Brayboy** of **Goldman Sachs**, **Ankit Desai** of **Lillette Advisors**, **Gerry Harrington** of **Capitol**

City Group, Josh Tzucker of Crowell & Moring, Mark Schuermann of HSBC and Nicole Venable of Invariant.

— And at a World Wi-Fi celebration at the **Consumer Technology Association's** townhouse, per a tipster: Reps. **Deborah Ross** (D-N.C.) and **Darren Soto** (D-Fla.); House Energy and Commerce Committee's **John Lin, Johanna Thomas** and **Parul Desai**; **Jeremy Marcus** and **Mary Huang** of Rep. **Doris Matsui's** (D-Calif.) office; **Georgia McLean** of Rep. **Rob Menendez's** (D-N.J.) office, **Kevin Robinson** of the **Wi-Fi Alliance**, **Kelsey Odom, Cliff Riccio** and **Lee Friedman** of **NCTA**; **Tiago Rodrigues** of the **Wireless Broadband Alliance**, **Erica McCann, Jaime Hjort** and **Kristine Hackman** of **Amazon**; **Nathan White** of **Meta**, **David Trope** of **Garmin** and **J. David Grossman** and **Rachel Nemeth** of **CTA**.

— And at Holland & Knight's annual rooftop party, per a tipster: **Lizzie Irwin** of the **Center for Humane Technology**, **J.J. Ong** of **Freeport McMoRan**, **John Seale** of **Bristow Group**, **Erik Milito** and **Coby Sammis** of the **National Ocean Industries Association**, **Kevin Rejent** of **Energizer**, **Anne Gordon** of the **National Foreign Trade Council**, **Kathleen Black** of **Visa**, **Linda Evans** of **IBM**, **Tracy Turner** of **Smithfield Foods**, **Larry Meehan** of **Hermeus**, **Adam Goodwin** of **Pacific Defense**, **Cheryl Coleman**, **David Waggoner** and **Kristen Hildreth** of the **Recycled Materials Association**; **Dan Lieberman** of **Nufarm**, **Mat Sanders**, **Zachary Bartscherer** and **Kristiane Huber** of the **Pew Charitable Trust**; **Macy Lemon** and **Mathew Mengesha** from **Share Our Strength/No Kid Hungry** and **Nick Kazvini** of **Applied Intuition**.

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JOBS REPORT

- **Luke Frans** has joined **PLUS Communications** as a managing director. He was previously a senior director at **Purple Strategies**.
- **Alexandra Victor May** has joined the U.S. government relations and public policy team at **Santander** as a senior director. She was previously a deputy assistant secretary in Treasury's Office of Legislative Affairs and is a **Dick Durbin, Cornerstone Government Affairs** and **Chuck Schumer** alum.
- **Kate Kamber Brennan** is joining **Rational 360** as senior vice president of digital. She previously led stakeholder targeting programs for **Edelman's** global business marketing team.
- **Andrew Forman** is now a partner at **Latham & Watkins**. He previously was deputy assistant attorney general in the Justice Department's antitrust division.
- **Raymond Tolentino** is now a partner with **Cooley's** commercial litigation practice. He previously was special assistant to the president and senior associate White House counsel under Biden.
- **Leidos** has hired **Elizabeth Austin-Mackenzie** as director of government affairs for health and veterans' issues and **Robert Peters** as director of government affairs for national security issues. Austin-Mackenzie was most recently a senior policy adviser for Senate Veterans' Affairs ranking member **Richard Blumenthal** (D-Conn.) and Peters was most recently a senior associate director at **APCO Worldwide** and is a **John Ratcliffe** alum.
- **Matt Ferraro** has joined **Crowell & Moring** as a partner. He was previously senior counselor for cybersecurity and emerging technology to former DHS Secretary **Xavier Becerra** and the executive director of the DHS Artificial Intelligence Safety and Security Board.
- **Vox Global** has promoted **James Baril** to senior partner and **Justin Rouse** to partner. Baril leads the agency's behavioral insights and AI work, and Rouse heads its health care practice.
- **Eloise Denker** has joined **Ervin Graves Strategy Group** as a research associate.

— Former Air Force Secretary **Frank Kendall** will be a nonresident senior fellow with the **Center for American Progress**’ national security and international policy team.

— **Nicole Mason** is now a senior counsel at Tully Rinckey. She previously was senior EEO adviser for Commerce’s National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration research office.

— **Ryan Thomas Boop** has joined **Cozen O’Connor Public Strategies** in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He most recently served as chief of staff to Pennsylvania Senate Majority Whip **Ryan Aument**.

— **Jeremy Eaton** is now director of strategy for **Techne**. He previously was digital marketing strategist at **Majority Strategies**.

— **David McGowan** is now vice president of state government relations at the **American Petroleum Institute**. McGowan most recently served as API’s Southeast Region director.

— **Jessica Adair Brinich** is now senior legislative and policy counsel at the **Strategic Organizing Center**. She previously was attorney-adviser for the Army’s Office of General Counsel in the Biden administration.

— **Jason Rzepka** will be senior director at **Rally**. He most recently was president and founder of **Writ Large**, and is an **MTV** and **Everytown for Gun Safety** alum.

— **Lindsey Specht** is now of counsel at **Dickinson Wright**. She most recently was a senior attorney for **Stand Together** and **Americans for Prosperity**, and is an FEC alum.

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NEW JOINT FUNDRAISERS

None.

NEW PACS

Greatness Creates Greatness Political Action Committee Inc (Hybrid PAC)

STRONG AS GRANITE PAC (Super PAC)

NEW LOBBYING REGISTRATIONS

1607 Strategies, LLC: Stonington Global Obo Beth Medrash Govoha

Alpine Group Partners, LLC.: Cardiac Insight, Inc.

Ballard Partners: Hanwha Q Cells America Inc.

Ballard Partners: Terra Solar U.S. LLC

Bgr Government Affairs: Ae Industrial Partners, Lp

Bgr Government Affairs: Circle

Bgr Government Affairs: Decentralization Research Center

Bgr Government Affairs: Enstructure, LLC

Bgr Government Affairs: Karsun Solutions

Bgr Government Affairs: Kohler Co.

Bgr Government Affairs: Mastercard International Incorporated

Bgr Government Affairs: The Trustees Of The University Of Pennsylvania

Bgr Government Affairs: The University Of Chicago

Bgr Government Affairs: Worldquant, LLC

Bockorny Group, Inc.: Surdex Corporation

Canfield Consulting, LLC: Caresource

Canfield Consulting, LLC: Codeiak Innovation, LLC On Behalf Of Fiber Dynamics, Inc.

Canfield Consulting, LLC: Codeiak Innovation, LLC On Behalf Of Knowmadics, Inc.

Carol G Holladay & Associates: Pharmadva

Carpi & Clay, Inc: (Filed In Error) City Of Inglewood

Continental Strategy, LLC: Pharmaceutical Care Management Association (Pcma)

Continental Strategy, LLC: Relativity Space

Continental Strategy, LLC: Sociedad De Fomento Fabril (Sofofa)

Cornerstone Government Affairs, Inc.: San Jacinto College Community District

Dla Piper LLP (US): Bionj, Inc.

Executive Strategies, Ltd. Co.: Darkflite, Inc.

First Principles Strategies, LLC: The Clapham Group, LLC On Behalf Of Children'S Equity Fund

Harbinger Strategies, LLC: 1X Technologies

Holland & Knight LLP: Ion Clean Energy, Inc.

John Grzebien: Rhode Island Turnpike And Bridge Authority

Jump Crypto Holdings LLC: Jump Crypto Holdings LLC

K&L Gates, LLP: Robert Bosch LLC

Mcdermott+ LLC: Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare

Mr. Stephen M. Ryan: Free File, Inc.

Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP: Money Services Business Association, Inc.

Richard Mcgivern: Friends Of Seymour Johnson Air Force Base

Thorn Run Partners: Acorns

Thorsen French Advocacy LLC: Bria Artificial Intelligence Inc.

NEW LOBBYING TERMINATIONS

Bgr Government Affairs: Adarga

Bgr Government Affairs: National Resilience, Inc.

Bgr Government Affairs: Recycling Infrastructure Now

Carpi & Clay, Inc: (Filed In Error) City Of Inglewood

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