

THE BOWLINE GROUP

THE BOWLINE BRIEF

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**Politics, government affairs and public safety
for the law enforcement community.**

WEEKLY EDITION

September 25, 2026

**WHAT HAPPENED. WHAT I THINK IT MEANS.
WHY IT MATTERS TO LAW ENFORCEMENT. WHAT COMES NEXT.**

The campaign map moved. The policy map did too.

- 1. The Senate battlefield tightened again.** Cook Political Report moved Georgia to Likely Democratic, North Carolina to Lean Democratic and Kansas to Lean Republican on September 23, while keeping seven Senate races in Toss Up: Alaska, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, New Hampshire, Ohio and Texas.
- 2. Republican Senate spending is increasingly about defense.** GOP advertisers held a large television-impression advantage in Texas and Ohio in the first half of September, while public debate continues over how much to invest in Georgia and North Carolina.
- 3. Iowa became a warning about relying on one poll.** Emerson had Republican Ashley Hinson ahead 50%-45% earlier this month; Marist, surveying registered voters September 17-20, had Democrat Josh Turek ahead 50%-42%. The disagreement is the story.
- 4. The House map is still moving in court.** The 8th Circuit backed Missouri's Republican-drawn map on September 21 but paused its ruling until September 28, leaving the Supreme Court another decision point before ballots are finalized.
- 5. DOJ just created a new \$25 million law-enforcement grant program.** The ANGEL Grant Program was announced September 24 for state, local and tribal efforts tied to violent crime, gangs, cartels, trafficking and Homeland Security Task Force activity.
- 6. Today is a real grant deadline.** Body-worn-camera and Public Safety and Mental Health applications hit Grants.gov today; state Byrne JAG reaches its JustGrants deadline today.
- 7. The Flock fight widened again.** Oregon lawmakers are now considering a 2027 ban, Connecticut restrictions take effect October 1, and Missouri must issue ALPR best-practice guidance by September 26 under Gov. Mike Kehoe's executive order.
- 8. 287(g) has crossed a scale threshold.** ICE now reports more than 2,500 active agreements across 39 states and two territories, making local participation a permanent operational and political issue.
- 9. Federal law-enforcement legislation did not materially advance this week.** H.R. 309, the National Law Enforcement Officers Remembrance, Support, and Community Outreach Act, remains in the Senate after House passage September 14.
- 10. Washington remains in campaign mode.** With the House out, the actionable work for public-safety organizations is increasingly grants, agency implementation, state policy and preparation for the lame duck.

MY READ

This week was less about one dominant headline and more about the map hardening. The Senate board narrowed into a clearer set of must-watch races, the House map is still being litigated, and federal public-safety policy is moving through grants and administrative action even while Congress campaigns.

The Senate: seven races now define the center of the board

Cook updated its Senate ratings September 23. That gives us a clean weekly baseline without pretending the polling is cleaner than it is.

The new external map

Cook now lists Alaska, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, New Hampshire, Ohio and Texas as Toss Ups. Georgia moved to Likely Democratic, North Carolina to Lean Democratic and Kansas to Lean Republican. That is a meaningful change from last week: Georgia is no longer in Cook's competitive top tier, while North Carolina remains competitive but with a Democratic advantage.

Georgia and North Carolina: the resource argument did not disappear

The NRSC publicly pushed back this week on reporting that Republicans were shifting away from Georgia and North Carolina. The underlying question remains legitimate because the polling is difficult for Republicans: a September 22-23 Quantus poll had Roy Cooper ahead of Michael Whatley 48%-43% in North Carolina, while recent Georgia polling has shown Jon Ossoff ahead of Mike Collins.

Iowa: conflicting polls are the useful signal

The September Emerson/Nexstar survey had Hinson at 50% and Turek at 45%. A Marist survey of 1,050 registered voters conducted September 17-20 found Turek at 50% and Hinson at 42%, with a +/-4.4-point margin of error. Different populations and methods can produce different results. For clients, the point is not to choose the poll we like; it is to recognize that Iowa is volatile enough to remain a top-tier race.

Michigan and Iowa candidates separate from Trump on Iran

Reuters reported September 21 that Republican Senate candidates Mike Rogers in Michigan and Ashley Hinson in Iowa called for a swift end to the Iran war, diverging from President Trump as fuel costs and the war become campaign liabilities. That is a closing-message signal: candidates in competitive states are adjusting around local economic pressure.

THE BOWLINE TAKE

The Senate story is now triage. Seven Toss Ups are enough to consume enormous money, and the map is wide enough that every new problem - fuel prices, candidate controversy, a bad poll or a late spending decision - can force resources out of another state.

The standing political dashboard

External ratings below are snapshots from Cook Political Report, updated September 23. TBG is tracking movement, not making winner predictions.

RACE	COOK SIGNAL	THIS WEEK
AK SEN	Toss Up	No rating change; remains a core Republican defense.
GA SEN	Likely D	Moved out of the competitive top tier on Sept. 23.
IA SEN	Toss Up	Conflicting Emerson and Marist polls reinforce volatility.
ME SEN	Toss Up	Collins-Jackson remains a top-tier contest.
MI SEN	Toss Up	Rogers adjusts Iran-war message; race remains top tier.
NH SEN	Toss Up	Pappas-Sununu remains top tier after Sept. 15 shift.
NC SEN	Lean D	Cooper continues to lead recent public polling.
OH SEN	Toss Up	GOP advertising advantage remains substantial.
TX SEN	Toss Up	Paxton-Talarico continues to absorb national money.
KS SEN	Lean R	Cook moved Kansas into its competitive universe.
HOUSE	D +2 to +10	Inside Elections projection as of Sept. 17.
GOVERNORS	Multi-state	AK moved to Toss Up Sept. 17; IA/OH/NV/WI remain central watches.

WHAT CHANGED

Georgia moved off last week's top competitive tier; Kansas moved onto the broader competitive board. The seven Toss Ups are now the cleanest weekly Senate continuity list.

The map fight is still not finished

The chamber is out, but redistricting and district-level movement continue to shape the control fight.

Missouri: appellate win, Supreme Court clock

On September 21, the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals backed Missouri's Republican-drawn congressional map and directed a lower court toward an injunction allowing its use. The appeals court paused its ruling until September 28 to allow time for Supreme Court review. For now, election officials have been operating under the older map that preserves Rep. Emanuel Cleaver's Kansas City-based district.

Inside Elections still sees a narrow House

Inside Elections' September 17 outlook projects a Democratic gain of two to ten seats from the current 220-215 Republican majority. The same update moved FL-14 to Toss-up and shifted several Republican-held districts toward greater competitiveness. There was no newer full ratings release by early Friday morning, so those changes remain the baseline this week.

NY-17 remains a labor test

The Lawler-Conley race remains on the board because it captures a broader theme: individual unions can break differently from statewide labor federations. There was no comparable new endorsement wave this week, so the useful update is continuity rather than inventing movement.

WHY IT MATTERS

House control remains narrow enough that court decisions and a small number of district-level shifts can matter as much as the national generic ballot. Missouri is the immediate legal watch; the next full ratings movement is the political watch.

State races are becoming part of the federal story

Twenty-six states are holding both Senate and gubernatorial elections, creating real potential for split-ticket outcomes.

Alaska moved

Cook shifted the Alaska governor race from Lean Republican to Toss Up on September 17. That makes Alaska a two-race state to watch: governor and Senate, both with implications for national spending and turnout.

Iowa remains a split-ticket laboratory

Emerson's September survey found Democrat Rob Sand ahead of Republican Zach Lahn 49%-46% for governor while Republican Ashley Hinson led Democrat Josh Turek 50%-45% for Senate. Emerson found about six percent of voters splitting between Hinson and Sand. That is exactly why governor and Senate coverage should be read together.

The broader board

Georgia, Nevada, Ohio and Wisconsin remain central gubernatorial battlegrounds, with Michigan and Oregon also worth following. Inside Elections noted this week that at least half a dozen states could produce split outcomes between their Senate and governor races.

LAW ENFORCEMENT LENS

Governors control budgets, appointments, state police priorities, labor policy and the implementation of technology rules. The Missouri ALPR order is a reminder that state executive action can move faster than Congress.

The work moved from floor votes to implementation

Congress is campaigning. Agencies and states are still making policy.

H.R. 309: no material movement

The House passed the National Law Enforcement Officers Remembrance, Support, and Community Outreach Act on September 14 and the bill was received in the Senate September 15. No further Senate action was posted by early Friday morning. The measure would authorize \$6 million annually for seven fiscal years for National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund programming, subject to appropriations.

No FLOCK Act: still at the starting line

H.R. 10366, the bipartisan No FLOCK Act, was introduced by Reps. Raja Krishnamoorthi and Michael Cloud and referred to House Transportation and Infrastructure. The bill would eventually withhold 10% of certain federal surface-transportation funds from states that do not limit ALPR use to specified purposes. No committee action was identified this week.

Mail ballots: status unchanged

The Supreme Court's September 14 order blocking implementation of the new Postal Service ballot-mail rule for the 2026 election remains the operative status. USPS halted work on the related system. There was no material federal change this week, so this moves from headline to implementation watch.

FOR OUR CLIENTS

This is the time to work two calendars at once: the remaining FY2026 grant calendar and the 2027 legislative/appropriations agenda. The people who organize now will be ahead when Congress returns.

A new \$25 million program changes the page

The grant calendar is not winding down. DOJ added a major new local-law-enforcement opportunity yesterday.

PROGRAM	GRANTS.GOV	JUSTGRANTS	STATUS / USE
State Byrne JAG	Passed	Sept. 25	JustGrants deadline today.
Body-Worn Camera	Sept. 25	Oct. 2	Grants.gov deadline today.
Public Safety & Mental Health	Sept. 25	Oct. 2	Grants.gov deadline today.
IP Enforcement	Passed	Sept. 30	Only applicants who met Grants.gov deadline can finish.
PDMP	Passed	Sept. 30	Only applicants who met Grants.gov deadline can finish.
Crime Gun Intelligence	Passed	Oct. 1	JustGrants completion window.
Local Byrne JAG	Oct. 9	Oct. 16	Direct formula funding for eligible locals.
ANGEL Grant Program	Oct. 20	Oct. 27	\$25M new competitive program; HSTF/violent crime focus.

ANGEL is the new item to understand

DOJ announced the \$25 million Assisting Neighborhoods and Governments with Enforcement of Laws (ANGEL) Grant Program on September 24. BJA says eligible state, local and tribal governments can seek funding for activities including investigating and prosecuting crimes committed by aliens, drug and human trafficking, court operations, temporary criminal detention, transportation and support tied to apprehension. DOJ says local-law-enforcement awards will support significant participation in Homeland Security Task Force activity and other efforts against gangs, cartels and violent crime.

DO THIS NOW

Agencies with a real HSTF, trafficking, violent-crime or immigration-enforcement role should read ANGEL immediately. For BWC and Public Safety & Mental Health, today is the Grants.gov deadline - not next week.

ALPR policy is moving faster than the federal bill

The federal No FLOCK Act did not advance this week, but states and local governments did not wait.

Missouri: guidance deadline is tomorrow

Gov. Mike Kehoe's Executive Order 26-18 requires the Missouri Department of Public Safety to make ALPR best-practice guidance available within 10 days of the September 16 order - September 26. The order already requires most data to be deleted within 30 days, limits use to legitimate criminal-justice and lifesaving purposes, prohibits vendor commercialization of Missouri-generated data and bars AI facial-recognition integration.

Connecticut: October 1 is now operational

Connecticut's new statewide ALPR restrictions take effect October 1. The law limits retention and data sharing and restricts certain investigative uses. Agencies using ALPRs should be treating this as a policy, training and vendor-contract issue, not simply a legislative story.

Oregon: a possible ban is now on the table

Oregon Capital Chronicle reported September 24 that lawmakers are considering legislation for 2027 that could ban Flock and similar automated license-plate-reading cameras. Local law-enforcement leaders are expected to push back based on investigative value. That is the next escalation in the national debate: some states are writing guardrails; others may debate prohibition.

New York local fights show the middle ground

Troy lawmakers are considering a local framework that would sharply reduce standard Flock data retention while allowing longer preservation with supervisory approval for investigations. That is another version of the emerging compromise: keep the tool, narrow the default retention, document exceptions.

THE BOWLINE TAKE

The most defensible law-enforcement position is getting clearer: preserve defined investigative uses, require a case-linked reason for searches, audit every query, limit retention and punish misuse. Agencies that help write those rules have a better chance of keeping the capability.

287(g) is now infrastructure, not a pilot

The scale of the program changed the way it should be covered.

ICE's current 287(g) materials reflect more than 2,500 active agreements across 39 states and two territories. That means the program is no longer a limited set of sheriff partnerships; it is a national enforcement network involving local departments, jails and state agencies.

The New York dispute remains active. Fifteen sheriffs are challenging the state's restrictions on local participation, and Greene County lawmakers this month adopted a resolution supporting the sheriffs' fight even though the county itself is not a party to the lawsuit.

The operational side is growing too. Texas is building a large armed detainee-transport network designed in part to move people arrested through local 287(g) activity to ICE processing and detention facilities. That turns local participation into a logistics, staffing and detention-capacity issue as well as a political one.

WHAT IT MEANS

For law-enforcement organizations, 287(g) now touches bargaining, staffing, training, liability, transport, jail operations, federal reimbursement and state preemption. The question is no longer simply whether an agency participates; it is what participation requires.

The political conversation underneath the headlines

- 1. The Senate map is getting more honest.** Georgia moving to Likely Democratic and Kansas to Lean Republican reduces some noise and concentrates attention on the seven Toss Ups.
- 2. Republican money is increasingly defensive.** Texas and Ohio are consuming enormous attention and impressions; that makes every marginal offensive dollar harder to justify.
- 3. Candidate separation from the White House is becoming a measurable closing tactic.** Rogers and Hinson on Iran are examples of candidates reacting to state-specific economic pressure.
- 4. House control is still a legal story as well as a campaign story.** Missouri can still alter the map before Election Day if the Supreme Court allows the appellate ruling to take effect.
- 5. Police technology is moving from politics into compliance.** Missouri guidance, Connecticut implementation and local retention rules mean chiefs and unions need actual policy positions, not talking points.
- 6. Federal grants are becoming a policy instrument.** ANGEL ties money directly to Homeland Security Task Force participation and specified enforcement activity. Watch where the awards go.

THE BOWLINE TAKE

The closing phase is becoming operational

Five weeks from Election Day, the useful political intelligence is no longer simply who is up or down. It is where money is being moved, where candidates are separating from national leaders, which maps will actually be used and which constituencies are being asked to validate campaigns.

For law enforcement, the same principle applies on policy. ALPR rules are turning into compliance requirements. 287(g) is turning into staffing and logistics. Grant announcements are turning into procurement capacity. The organizations that treat these as operational questions will have more influence than the ones that wait for Washington to settle down.

THE BOWLINE BOTTOM LINE

The Senate board is clearer but not calmer. The House map is still in court. Governors matter because state executives are writing public-safety policy now. DOJ added a \$25 million enforcement grant yesterday. And the Flock debate is moving from abstract privacy arguments to actual rules agencies will have to follow.

The next seven days

Every item below either changed this week or remains an explicit continuity watch.

SENATE MONEY	Whether Republican spending shifts materially after Cook moved Georgia and North Carolina toward Democrats.
IOWA	New polling that helps reconcile the Emerson/Marist gap in Hinson-Turek and the split-ticket governor dynamic.
OHIO / TEXAS	Whether the Republican advertising advantage changes public polling or simply raises the cost of defense.
MISSOURI MAP	September 28 expiration of the 8th Circuit pause and any Supreme Court action before then.
HOUSE RATINGS	The next Inside Elections or Cook movement after the Sept. 17 district changes.
GOVERNORS	Alaska after its move to Toss Up; Iowa, Ohio, Nevada, Wisconsin, Georgia, Michigan and Oregon.
MISSOURI ALPR	DPS best-practice guidance due Sept. 26 under Executive Order 26-18.
CONNECTICUT ALPR	Statewide restrictions take effect Oct. 1; watch agency and vendor implementation.
OREGON FLOCK	Whether a proposed 2027 ban gains legislative sponsors or organized law-enforcement opposition.
NO FLOCK ACT	Cosponsors or committee action on H.R. 10366.
287(g)	Growth beyond 2,500 agreements, New York litigation and state/local operational costs.
ANGEL GRANTS	Application guidance, likely applicants and how DOJ defines significant HSTF participation.
DOJ DEADLINES	Sept. 30 IP/PDMP completion; Oct. 1 crime-gun and other JustGrants deadlines; Oct. 2 BWC/Public Safety & Mental Health.
H.R. 309	Any Senate committee movement on the law-enforcement memorial and safety legislation.

What leadership plans to move immediately after Nov. 3, especially appropriations and public-safety measures.

Editorial note: External race ratings are attributed to the named nonpartisan forecaster and are snapshots, not TBG predictions. Polling is reported with date/population context where material. Analysis labeled 'My Read,' 'What I'm Hearing' or 'The Bowline Take' reflects TBG's assessment of strategic and operational significance.

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