

# [***Colorado GOP chair's embrace of Trump tactics splits party as he tries to boost his own campaign***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C27-C3V1-DYMD-64F3-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — At a recent primary debate, congressional candidate Dave Williams took the microphone and unleashed the same MAGA arguments that vaulted him from a former state representative to chairman of the Colorado Republican Party.

“Right now we have a battle for the soul of our party,” Williams said.

Williams' zeal and deployment of former President Donald Trump's combative style of ***politics*** as state pary chairman has riven the Colorado GOP, reflecting the Trump-shaped rift in the national Republican Party.

But recent brazen maneuvers from Williams, including using his position as chair to try to usher himself into Congress, inflamed tensions. Some Republican officials in Colorado fell in lockstep, others demanded Williams' resignation.

Through it all, Williams has caught Trump’s attention, a fact he didn’t let the crowd forget at the debate against his Republican rival for a Colorado House seat, Jeff Crank.

"I’m Dave Williams. I’m chairman of the Colorado Republican Party. And I’m also the Trump endorsed candidate," he said in his first utterances of Thursday's debate, later touting Trump's cell phone number saved in his own phone.

Crank tried to make sure the audience didn't forget the tempest around Williams, referencing Williams' refusal to step down as party chair after joining the primary race, allegedly using the state party's email list to announce his campaign for Congress and spending party money to purchase mailers that included an attack on Crank.

“My opponent has spent too much time fighting other Republicans than fighting Democrats,” Crank said. “Where’s all the money to fight Democrats? It’s going to him, it’s going into his pocke and it’s going into his campaign.”

Williams' maneuvers flouted state party norms across the U.S.

“He’s cannibalizing the Republican party so he can go to Congress," said Kelly Maher, a veteran GOP operative who filed a complaint against Williams with the Federal Elections Commission.

A statement from the Williams campaign did not respond to the complaint's accusations, instead lobbing invective at Crank and calling the complaint an attempt “to generate fake news."

William’s ascension and campaign mirror the national split among the GOP between a more combative, MAGA flank, which includes Republican Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, and more traditional Republicans, some of whom, such as Rep. Ken Buck of Colorado, have [*fled Congress*](https://apnews.com/article/ken-buck-resigns-congress-colorado-ba8123ca43626ee07150a423aa0fcb07) while citing the new divisiveness in their party.

Whoever wins in the GOP June 25 primary for the reliably Republican seat being vacated by retiring Rep. Doug Lamborn will likely win the general election. Williams unsuccessfully challenged Lamborn in the 2022 primary when a judge barred him from listing his name on the ballot as Dave “Let’s Go Brandon” Williams.

“The Colorado Republican Party, in my opinion, certainly under Williams' leadership, has been forced to ask questions that they never grappled with before,” said state Rep. Matt Soper, a Republican who worked with Williams in the Statehouse. “What kind of Republican Party do we want to be?"

Williams' tenure has left Colorado GOP rife with public infighting, in no small part prompted by his own attacks on fellow Republicans. While avoiding news interviews, Williams has sent short statements amounting to diatribes against rival Republicans, Democrats or the media.

Some Republicans appreciate the defense of the party’s conservative core from more moderate Republicans they see as muddling the movement and failing constituents.

“We’ve had decades of Republicans telling us that they are going to go and limit government, but then they don’t,” Williams said at the debate, as some audience members murmured in agreement.

That agenda has pushed Williams to wade beyond the traditional purview of a state party chair. State parties, at least publicly, tend to stay out of primary races, giving voters breathing room to choose their candidates. Under Williams, the Colorado Republican Party endorsed Republican primary candidates over others.

That included Republican Rep. Lauren Boebert, who faced her own [*accusations of opportunistic maneuvers*](https://apnews.com/article/lauren-boebert-district-colorado-republican-election-58cf21682012023f1362a01932909d36) after hopping congressional districts. Boebert politically falls near Williams as an unyielding, far-right member of Congress in line with Gaetz.

In April, [*Williams ejected a journalist*](https://apnews.com/article/colorado-sun-republican-williams-fish-reporter-96369539ed400b35ca95f294e259c8b9) from an official Republican Party gathering, provoking a national outcry and disapproval from Colorado Republicans, including Boebert primary opponent Deborah Flora. The state party subsequently announced its endorsement of Boebert over Flora.

Seth Masket, a University of Denver political scientist, noted that while political parties are supposed to be neutral, in internal primaries they often informally back one candidate or another. Williams has erased even the appearance of neutrality, he said.

“There are definitely lines being crossed,” Masket said. “Williams is doing it in a much more overt and official way. There’s nothing subtle about it.”

Kolby Zipperer, chairman of the El Paso County Young Republicans, attended Thursday's debate. When he entered the room, Zipperer, 35, was leaning toward Crank, concerned in part about the accusations of a lack of integrity against Williams.

"If I hear something in the lines of you’re a king, or your breaking the rules to benefit yourself. If I heard the same thing about (Crank) I’d have the same problem," Zipperer said.

But by the end of the event, it was a coin flip for Zipperer, who appreciated Williams' calm and talking points. While Williams can mirror Trump's fiery disposition in statements and social media posts, in front of an audience he is more even-keeled.

“If he’s lying, he’s tricking me,” he said, adding that he also really likes Crank. “It’s like trying to pick two step dads."

Former Colorado GOP Chairwoman Kristi Burton Brown doesn’t see the party’s divide as being between Trump and anti-Trump, saying she supports Trump not because of the former president’s political style, but chiefly because of his U.S. Supreme Court appointments and policy during his time in office.

“You can embrace that without thinking that, ‘Oh good. Now our entire party needs to adopt a combative, shove your face in the dirt style,’” Brown said. “Hate and divisiveness eventually blows up in its own face.”

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Bedayn is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

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