

# [***Donald Trump's GOP allies show up in force as Michael Cohen takes the stand in hush money trial***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C17-G921-DYMD-64BD-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

With Donald Trump barred from publicly attacking the key witness in his hush money trial, his campaign [*brought to court a phalanx*](https://apnews.com/live/trump-trial-updates-michael-cohen-day-16) of Republican elected officials to speak for him.

“The thing that the president is prevented from saying, which is a disgrace, is that every single person involved in this prosecution is practically a Democratic political operative,” U.S. Sen. JD Vance of Ohio said outside the courthouse Monday during a morning break.

Trump's former fixer Michael Cohen took the stand on Monday to allege that the former president instructed him to silence stories that could have hurt his 2016 presidential campaign. Trump, who is balancing the demands of a felony trial with his third run for the White House, has been prohibited by a judge's gag order from criticizing witnesses and already fined for violating the restrictions.

Bringing allies to court allowed Trump's campaign to press his message without violating the gag order. It also gave those allies a high-profile platform to demonstrate loyalty to their party's presumptive nominee and perhaps audition for higher office.

According to Trump’s campaign, all of his courthouse guests Monday volunteered to appear to support the former president and were not explicitly invited by people affiliated with the campaign. But U.S. Sen. Rick Scott of Florida, who was at court with Trump last week, said Monday that he had been invited by Susie Wiles, a senior adviser to Trump's campaign and also a longtime Florida GOP operative who advised Scott's 2010 gubernatorial bid.

“I went because President Trump’s a friend," Scott said. "I’ve known him longer than I’ve been in ***politics***.”

Vance, widely seen as a contender to be Trump's vice presidential pick, was part of a group that arrived at court with Trump and stood behind him as he addressed reporters before heading into the courtroom. It was the biggest single showing of the allies joining Trump in court for the hush money trial since it began last month.

Others in Monday's group included Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama, U.S. Rep. Nicole Malliotakis of New York, and a pair of attorneys general, Steve Marshall of Alabama and Brenna Bird of Iowa. Former GOP rival Vivek Ramaswamy, who shuttered his campaign earlier this year but is considered a likely part of a new Trump administration, planned to come to court on Tuesday, according to a spokesman for the entrepreneur.

Vance was once a harsh critic who said he “can’t stomach Trump" and [*called him*](https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-kentucky-poverty-jd-vance-ohio-52901ab3819b5da35dda7b7921f6841a) “noxious.” Now, he is a close ally who will appear with Trump at an Ohio fundraiser on Wednesday, when the trial will be on break.

Vance posted a thread on the X social platform as he headed to court with the former president, including a missive from the courtroom questioning Cohen’s believability: “Cohen can’t remember how old his son is or how old he was when he started to work for Trump but I’m sure he remembers extremely small details from years ago!”

He also leveled criticism directly at the daughter of Judge Juan M. Merchan, who is overseeing the case. The gag order pertaining to Trump prohibits his critical comments about people affiliated with the case — except for Merchan and District Attorney Alvin Bragg — as well as Merchan's family members.

Merchan’s daughter is a political consultant whose firm has worked for Democrats.

Outside court with Vance, Tuberville on Monday questioned the citizenship of the jurors, suggesting there were “supposedly American citizens in that courtroom,” and portrayed Bragg as a publicity-seeker.

He described Trump as “going through mental anguish in a courtroom. That's very depressing.”

There have been one-off supportive trial appearances already, when allies including Scott and Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton came to court with Trump. Both Scott and Paxton have been through legal troubles of their own, and have railed against what they call politically motivated prosecutions — a message that echoes Trump’s own.

[*Scott's appearance*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-daniels-trial-rick-scott-3ae0d6eddb94d2ca1155b0266dc9d35c) came on another pivotal day in the case, as porn actor Stormy Daniels testified about her alleged 2006 sexual encounter with Trump.

Outside the courthouse, Scott said Merchan's daughter is “a political operative and raises money for Democrats" — a criticism prohibited for Trump himself by his gag order, which bans him from making or directing others to make public statements about people connected to the case, including the judge’s family. Scott denied his presence had anything specifically to do with the gag order.

Paxton did not speak publicly when he joined Trump last week, but he gave interviews later to Fox Business and Newsmax about the trial, calling it “perversion of justice.”

Trump’s attorneys have argued against the gag order, saying the former president should be allowed to respond to Daniels’ testimony, but Merchan has refused a request to modify it.

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Kinnard reported from Columbia, South Carolina. Jill Colvin in New York and Stephany Matat in West Palm Beach, Florida, contributed to this report.

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