

# [***Anti-Trump Republican Larry Hogan navigates dangerous political terrain in pivotal Senate contest***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BTM-3P61-DYMD-6249-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Associated Press

April 17, 2024 Wednesday 1:11 PM GMT

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**Section:** DOMESTIC NEWS; POLITICAL NEWS; STATE AND REGIONAL

**Length:** 1281 words

**Byline:** STEVE PEOPLES and BRIAN WITTE, Associated Press

**Dateline:** STEVENSVILLE, Md.

**Body**

STEVENSVILLE, Md. — Andy DePaola welcomed [*Larry Hogan*](https://apnews.com/hub/larry-hogan) to his family's restaurant with a big smile and a handshake. The warning came a few minutes later.

DePaola, the 64-year-old namesake of DePaola's Bagel and Brunch here in Maryland’s conservative Eastern Shore, whispered to a reporter that Hogan better avoid disparaging former President Donald Trump.

“I'm a Trumper,” DePaola said as Hogan posed for pictures and made small talk with the excited breakfast crowd on a recent Friday morning. "I think Larry would be better off if he kept how he felt about Trump under his breath.”

The brief exchange during a weeks-long bus tour illustrates a stark political reality for the popular Republican former governor, who has [*single-handedly transformed*](https://apnews.com/article/senate-maryland-larry-hogan-candidate-17144120d77d924ebf707b8a94efd36e) Maryland's sleepy Senate race into a top-tier contest in the national fight for [*the Senate majority*](https://apnews.com/article/2022-midterm-elections-senate-control-explainer-a262fff4abb380104b772f6deea2b62c). Hogan, who was perhaps the most outspoken anti-Trump Republican governor in the nation, can ill afford to lose any pieces of his delicate and diverse political coalition.

He's hoping to become the first Republican in more than 40 years to win a Senate seat in this deep-blue state, where Democrats outnumber Republicans by a 2-1 ratio statewide, with much of the Democratic support in Baltimore and the suburbs of Washington. Over the next six months, Hogan will have to fend off political threats from all sides.

As Trump loyalists eye the 67-year-old businessman with skepticism, [*Democrats are counting on abortion rights*](https://apnews.com/article/democrats-abortion-ivf-reproductive-rights-roe-40a80fbe83a99f37d15699c47579636d) to make Hogan's historic challenge even harder. But the R after Hogan's name may ultimately prove the most serious liability for him in a state Trump lost by 33 points four years ago.

If Hogan wins Maryland’s open Senate seat, Republicans would almost certainly claim the majority in the U.S. Senate — and with it, the power to control the agenda and [*judicial nominations*](https://apnews.com/article/biden-politics-wisconsin-us-republican-party-democratic-f7a6024e543bb018742b06a591121552) for the next two years, at least.

In an interview, Hogan confirmed that he would caucus with Republicans in Washington, despite his concerns about Trump’s grip on the party. He also vowed not to leave the GOP after the election, even if Trump returns to the White House.

“I’m a real Republican,” Hogan told The Associated Press, noting that he does not identify with Trump’s “Make America Great Again” movement.

When pressed to explain his concerns about MAGA, and whether he views Trump as a threat to U.S. democracy, Hogan parsed his words carefully.

“I think certainly there has been some threats,” Hogan said. “But you know, I think that’s not what this campaign is really all about.”

Meanwhile, Hogan's opponents on the left are only just beginning to organize as Democrats wade through their own nomination process. While Hogan faces token opposition in the GOP, Democrats will pick Hogan's general election opponent next month.

On Tuesday, a coalition of labor, immigration and progressive groups gathered in the state capital to criticize the former governor for using his veto powers to block legislation to increase abortion access while undermining other Democratic priorities, including health care, environmental protection and education funding.

The anti-Hogan event was a reminder that voters in his gubernatorial elections may have been more willing to overlook party affiliation than they will be in a Senate contest that could tilt the balance of power in Washington toward Republicans.

“Despite him claiming to be a moderate, we know his actions show that he’s a staunch Republican,” said 1199 SEIU political director Ricarra Jones, who slammed Hogan’s veto of legislation to increase the state’s minimum wage to $15 an hour.

“The Senate race in November is bigger than just Maryland," she continued. "A Republican-dominated Senate would pursue a drastically different agenda, one that could unwind years of progressive achievements and reshape Maryland’s policy landscape in ways that could take generations to reverse.”

Meanwhile, Hogan is trying to avoid divisive political disputes as he reintroduces himself to Maryland voters during a low-profile “Back to Work” bus tour across the state.

Perhaps the nation’s most vocal [*anti-Trump Republican*](https://apnews.com/article/2024-elections-anti-trump-republicans-b62ae9bb1ee38bf3ec18da59352bf3dd) governor while in office, Hogan barely mentions Trump's name unless asked about him. He’s just as eager to ignore abortion, even though Maryland is among the states that will vote on an [*abortion referendum*](https://apnews.com/article/abortion-ballot-amendment-ban-protection-states-2024-052ff9846f8416efb725240af22b92ec) this fall — a winning issue for Democrats in red and blue states alike where ballot questions have appeared since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to an abortion in 2022.

Democrats suggest he would support a federal abortion ban, but Hogan insisted in an interview that he would not.

He also said he strongly supports in-vitro fertilization and would introduce legislation to protect the practice, an apparent attempt to clarify his position after he declined to say in an Axios interview last month whether he would support such federal protections.

He also said he “would consider voting for” a Maryland ballot measure this fall that would preserve abortion rights, although he argues that it’s unnecessary.

Hogan said abortion doesn't comes up much on the campaign trail. He predicted it wouldn't be “a deciding issue” in the election.

Asked about the issues that matter most to him, Hogan said he’s most focused on ending the divisiveness in Washington, followed by the crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border, crime and the economy.

But Hogan largely avoided talking ***politics*** at all on his weekend bus tour, preferring to connect with voters on a personal level. He was eager to jump behind restaurant counters to chat with the kitchen staff or pose for pictures welcoming small business owners. And voters, regardless of their party affiliation, embraced him enthusiastically at nearly every stop.

Landa Mitchell, a 46-year-old old African American woman from Hanover, Maryland, flagged down the governor as he toured small business booths at a weekend boat show. She had met him years ago at a fundraiser for the homeless.

Mitchell said she’s not a Republican, but she’d likely vote for Hogan.

“He’s not far right wing. He’s over there, but he’s not far far over there,” Mitchell said with a laugh, adding that she’s not sure whether she’ll support President Joe Biden this fall because of the state of the economy. “I’m far from a Trump supporter, but I go into the grocery store today and I cry.”

Caroline County Sheriff Donald Baker, who welcomed Hogan on a tour through his office, said he also appreciates the former governor’s strong support for law enforcement, noting that the sheriff’s office didn’t get a single applicant for a recent job posting.

“It’s gonna be a tough road for him to navigate,” Baker said of Hogan’s political challenge. “If anybody can do it, I believe Larry Hogan can do it. Why? Because he is a middle-of-the-road kind of guy. He knows how to work with people.”

And as Democrats fight to link him to Trump's Republican Party, Hogan will take pains to distance himself from Trump — but not too far.

“We don’t want to alienate Trump voters,” Hogan told the AP. “We need Trump voters. And we need a lot of Biden voters. Maryland is tough.”

But he doesn't expect Trump or any other MAGA celebrities to campaign in Maryland on his behalf in the coming months. He said he's not sure if he'll even attend this summer's Republican National Convention, where Trump will formally become the GOP presidential nominee; Hogan skipped Trump's last two nominating conventions as well.

“I don't think Trump would help me at all. I ran 46 points ahead of him," Hogan said, noting that Trump lost Maryland in 2020 by a bigger margin than any other state in the nation. “I don’t think he needs to campaign in Maryland.”

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Witte reported from Annapolis, Maryland.

**Load-Date:** April 17, 2024

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