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Daily Scout, October 21: DeepSeek ban, Ohio's mother ad and Musk's Texas money

Biggest stories today: DHS orders DeepSeek out of federal civilian systems, a Ramaswamy-campaign ad using Amy Acton's estranged mother upends Ohio, and Musk's $150M+ in Texas Senate money. North Carolina's mail-ballot ruling and record early turnout round out the board.

9 min read · 13 sources

AI · Amy Acton · DHS · DeepSeek · Elections · Elon Musk · James Talarico · Ken Paxton · Politics · Vivek Ramaswamy

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Three stories carry the day. A DHS order pushes DeepSeek, and anything built on it, out of federal civilian systems. Ohio's governor race has turned on an ad the Ramaswamy campaign now owns. And campaign filings show how much of Texas's Senate race is paid for by one man. Early voting has opened in most states, with turnout records in Texas.

25	8–9	$158M	4.3% vs 2.8%	31,582
Stories tracked this morning	Outlets on each of the top stories	Musk gifts to Senate Leadership Fund (FEC filings, per Texas Tribune)	Travis Co. first-day turnout, 2026 vs 2022	NC absentee ballots already cast under the new rules

The board

STORY	BEAT	SIGNALS	ANGLE
DHS bans DeepSeek from federal civilian agencies	AI / Politics	8 outlets, +6 overnight	The order covers third-party products built on DeepSeek, not just the app
Ramaswamy campaign owns ad featuring Acton's estranged mother	Elections	4 outlets, ~2.3k Bluesky posts	The ad had no disclaimer, and the campaign claimed it only after backlash
Musk endorses Paxton after funding his Senate push	Elections / AI	Bluesky 3.3k posts	One donor's money has doubled the Democrat's ad spending
NC mail-ballot rules stand through midterms	Elections	3 outlets	The rule was adopted the day ballots went out; early rejection rates look about double 2022
Record first-day early voting in Texas	Elections	7 outlets, +5 overnight	Travis County beat 2018's turnout rate, not just 2022's
UN launches military-AI forum Thursday	AI / Politics	6 outlets	The UN's own research chief says the margin for human judgment is shrinking, including in nuclear
Beef producers and the Senate map	Elections	9 outlets, +6	Trump's policies have complicated support from a key rural bloc
Spotify: 50M AI slop tracks pulled from recommendations	AI	2 outlets	Down from 75M last year, and Spotify still won't mandate AI labels
Judge dismisses Ann Altman's suit against Sam Altman	AI	2 outlets	Dismissed for missed deadlines, not a ruling on the allegations

1. DHS orders DeepSeek out of federal civilian systems

What happened. DHS published an order, via the Federal Register, telling federal civilian agencies to stop buying DeepSeek products and remove them from government IT systems. It also covers third-party products and services built with DeepSeek technology, though agencies can request exceptions.[1] DHS's stated worry is that sensitive data from US government users could be reachable by Chinese authorities under Chinese law.[1]

Why it's moving. Eight outlets, six of them new since yesterday. China's Foreign Ministry responded the same day, opposing "overstretching the concept of national security and politicizing technology and trade issues."[1]

The angle: Most headlines say "bans DeepSeek." The more consequential detail is the third-party clause: any vendor that embeds DeepSeek models in a product sold to civilian agencies now has a compliance problem. That reaches through the supply chain, which is how CIO framed it. Also notable is the sequence. A December 2025 law covered only intelligence and national-security

systems; this order extends the restriction to civilian agencies, new purchases and existing systems.[1] It lands alongside a September US report accusing DeepSeek and five other Chinese firms of large-scale model distillation, and alongside a reported Chinese proposal to restrict exports of 23 AI technologies.[1]

Check before posting: The order is a civilian-agency measure; it is not a ban on private US use. The distillation allegations come from the US government, OpenAI and Anthropic; DeepSeek's response is not in the coverage I read. The China export-control item is a Bloomberg report of a proposal, not a rule.

Draft posts:

> *The DeepSeek order isn't just about the app. DHS says it also covers third-party products built on DeepSeek technology. Any vendor selling to civilian agencies now has to know what's under its hood. Exceptions are possible, but you have to ask.*

> *Timeline: Dec 2025, DeepSeek barred from intelligence systems. Oct 2026, civilian agencies must remove it too. Beijing says the US is "overstretching" national security. The AI supply chain is now a procurement question.*

2. Ohio: the Acton ad and who owns it

What happened. An ad circulated on social media Monday night featuring Donna Arthur, the estranged mother of Democratic candidate Amy Acton, calling her daughter "a liar."[2] It lacked the required disclosure of who paid for it, and had not aired on TV.[2] On Tuesday Ramaswamy told reporters it was "an ad from our campaign," per the Columbus Dispatch as cited by CBS.[2] Acton's brother Philip Stearns called it "a despicable low."[2]

Why it's moving. Acton has led polls for a month, the story is intensely personal, and the NYT, CBS, Forbes and local outlets all ran it. The Hill reports Sherrod Brown demanded Husted condemn it.[3]

The angle: What changed is the attribution. Initially it was described as an ad "spread by right-wing online influencers."[4] Within a day it was claimed by the campaign. The campaign spokesperson's line: "We don't know what happened between Amy and her mother."[2] That sits oddly beside running the ad. Court records provided by Acton's campaign show her stepfather was charged in 1978 with raping her when she was 10 to 12; he pleaded not guilty and left Ohio without facing charges.[2]

Check before posting: The abuse account rests on Acton's own prior statements and records her campaign supplied. Mark that. Do not describe the mother's claims as true or false; the coverage only establishes what each side says. Note the missing disclaimer, not an unproven legal violation.

Draft posts:

> *Timeline of the Acton ad: Monday night, an unattributed video appears online with no "paid for by" line. Tuesday, Ramaswamy says it's "an ad from our campaign." The origin question is settled. The disclosure question isn't.*

> *Ramaswamy's spokesperson says "we don't know what happened between Amy and her mother." The campaign's ad features the mother. Both are in the CBS report.*

3. Musk's money in Texas

What happened. Musk formally endorsed Ken Paxton after bankrolling his campaign for weeks; The Hill reports he has spent more than $150 million as the lone donor to Texas PAC.[5] FEC filings reported by the Texas Tribune show $75 million to Senate Leadership Fund on Sept. 9 and $83 million two weeks later, each passed to Texas PAC the next day.[6]

Why it's moving. Talarico's team is tying Musk to Paxton, and the Bluesky posts on it reach 3,300. Money is the story.

The angle: The number that reframes it is the ratio. SLF has spent over $159 million through Texas PAC, double Talarico's outlay, per AdImpact as cited by the Tribune.[6] Before this, Lone Star Liberty PAC had $35,000 in the bank at the end of June.[6] And SLF says it hasn't had to take money from other states. That claim is SLF's own.[6]

Check before posting: Figures differ by outlet: $150M+ (The Hill, CNN), $158M (Tribune headline, USA Today), "nearly $190 million" (Tribune's estimate of total Musk money in the race). Use "at least $158 million to SLF" and attribute it.

Draft posts:

> *Texas Senate, by the filings: Musk gave $75M to Senate Leadership Fund on Sept. 9 and $83M two weeks later. Each sum moved to Texas PAC the next day. The Tribune says SLF has spent $159M+, double Talarico's campaign.*

> *Before Musk's checks, the main pro-Paxton group had $35,000 in the bank at the end of June. Now one donor's money is on the air in every Texas media market.*

4. North Carolina's mail-ballot rules stand

What happened. Federal Judge Thomas Schroeder denied a preliminary injunction, writing the challengers were unlikely to win and had sued too late.[7] The rules, adopted Sept. 4 on a party-line vote, reject ballots that arrive in an unsealed inner envelope or only in a sealed outer one.[7] The State Board said 31,582 absentee ballots had already been cast under them.[7]

Why it's moving. Democracy Docket published data from 27 of 100 counties showing roughly a **3%** rejection rate, double 2022, with some Democratic areas at 7 to 8%.[8]

The angle: The ruling's own logic is about cure. Schroeder noted that voters can fix a mistake or vote in person.[7] The key question is whether they do: Democracy Docket says few do.[8]

Check before posting: The rejection data comes from volunteer monitors and advocacy groups (Common Cause NC, Southern Coalition for Social Justice), covering 27 counties. The 3,942 statewide figure is Democracy Docket's own projection. Some rejections predate the new rules. Attribute these.

Draft posts:

> *A federal judge let North Carolina's new mail-ballot rules stand. His reasoning: voters who botch the envelope can get a new ballot or vote in person. Advocacy groups say rejections are already at about 3%, double 2022, in the counties they track.*

5. Texas early voting sets first-day records

What happened. About **4.3%** of Travis County's 952,713 registered voters voted Monday, against 2.8% on the first day in 2022 and 4.14% in 2018.[9] KVUE's counts: 25,343 first-day voters in 2022; 32,036 in 2018.[9]

Why it's moving. Harris, Brazoria and other Texas counties reported records too, and nationwide headlines put ballots cast above 10 million.

The angle: The comparison with 2018 matters, since that was a high-turnout midterm year. Don't leap to who benefits, though. First-day crowds skew toward the most motivated voters.

Check before posting: The 10 million national figure is from a CBS affiliate headline I did not open. Texas is also the state with the Paxton-Talarico race, so don't imply turnout predicts a result.

Draft posts:

> *Travis County, Texas, beat its first-day early-vote record for every midterm this century: 4.3% of registered voters on Monday vs. 2.8% in 2022 and 4.14% in 2018. One county, one day, but it's a high bar.*

6. UN launches a military-AI forum Thursday

What happened. UNIDIR plans to launch an initiative Thursday that it calls the first international forum for key players on military AI.[10] Director Robin Geiss said "the margin for human judgment is increasingly narrow, including in the nuclear domain."[10] He asked: "Are we going to let machines target and kill human beings?"[11]

The angle: The useful context is the US move in September, proposing an AI "notification mechanism" with China to warn each other about AI incidents.[11] A forum with no binding power is what is on offer; the UN chief's call for a treaty on lethal autonomous weapons is separate.[11] It links to story 1: Washington is ringing China's AI firms off from government systems while talking to Beijing about incident warnings.

Check before posting: It launches Thursday, so say "will launch."

Draft posts:

> *The UN's disarmament research head says AI is "crowding out" human decision-making in war, including in nuclear contexts. UNIDIR launches a forum on military AI Thursday. Notably, the US proposed an AI incident notification channel with China in September.*

7. Beef producers and the Senate map

NPR's report says Trump's policies have complicated his support among beef producers in states with tight Senate races.[12] Only a short summary was available to me, so I cannot say which policies or races NPR names. Read the audio before posting.

> *NPR: Trump's policies have complicated support among beef producers, a bloc that matters in states where Senate control could be decided. Worth a listen before the final stretch.*

Also moving

- Spotify says it has removed 50 million-plus AI "slop" tracks from recommendations over the past year, after 75 million spam tracks last year; it hasn't mandated AI labels on all tracks.[13]

- A judge dismissed Ann Altman's lawsuit against Sam Altman with prejudice because she missed an independent medical exam and other deadlines; her former lawyer said he "continue[s] to believe in Annie." Altman's family has denied the claims.[14]

Connections

Stories 1 and 6 are two sides of one policy: the US is excluding Chinese AI from its systems while seeking channels with Beijing on AI risk. Stories 3 and 1 also meet: Musk, whose money is reshaping Texas, is the owner of an AI company that competes with the labs making distillation complaints about DeepSeek; I found no source tying these together, so treat it as context, not a claim.

Bottom line

Lead with DeepSeek's third-party clause and the Ohio ad's attribution shift. Both are verifiable and both have a "what changed" angle. Use Texas's money and NC's rejection numbers, attributed carefully, as the day's election posts.

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