

From Kentucky political unknown to MAGA fame, he faces jail if he returns home

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Nick Sortor was arrested last month in Oregon for disorderly conduct.

It was a huge boost for his career.

In an Oct. 2 [altercation with people protesting](#) the actions of Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Portland, Sortor grabbed American flags that were being burned and [walked through protest camps](#) before he was pushed to the ground.

In the ensuing scrum, police [arrested](#) Sortor and others on a misdemeanor charge.

Sortor, a Kentucky native, was already a prominent self-described journalist and conservative influencer on X, the social media platform formerly known as Twitter.

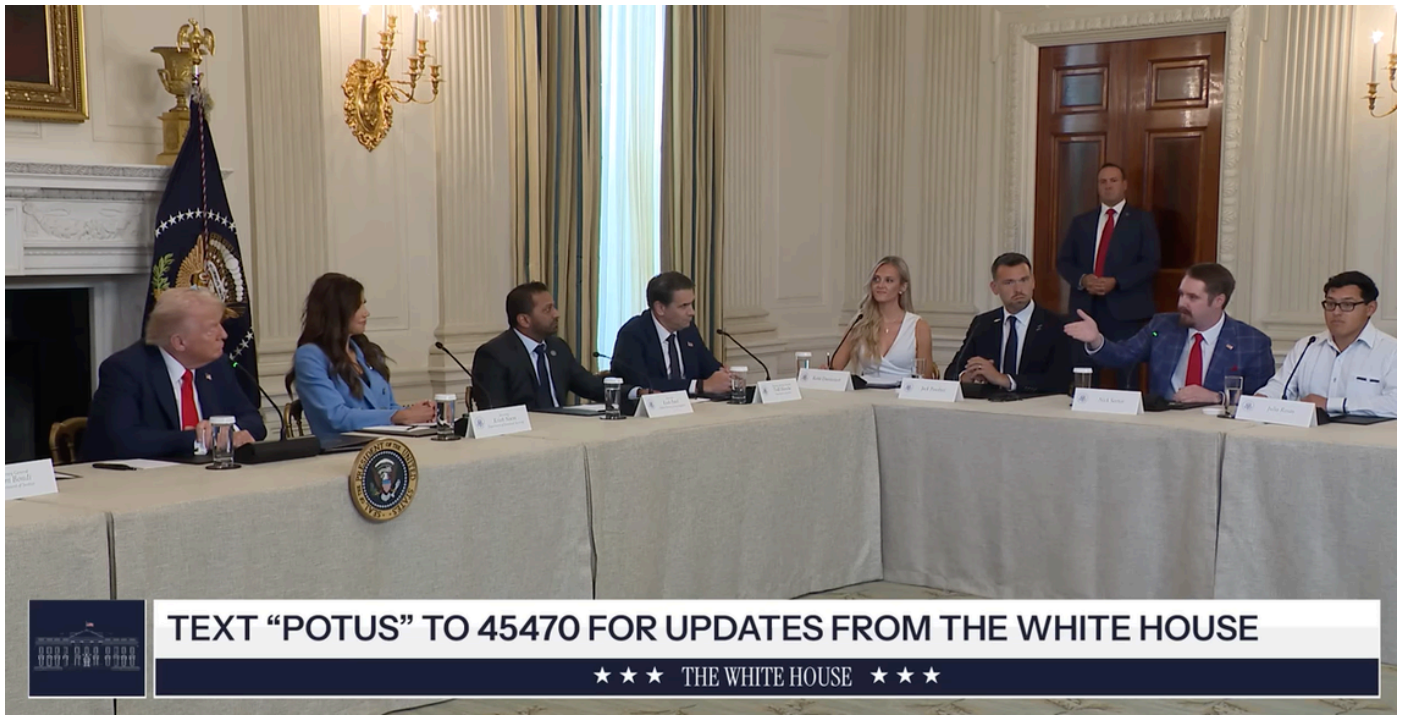
But the scene in Portland sent Sortor's star rising even higher. White House [Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt](#) fiercely defended him from her podium, Sortor made an appearance at a roundtable discussion with President Donald Trump and the [Washington Post featured him in a lengthy story](#).

At the roundtable, Sortor brought Trump a tattered, burnt American flag he said he took from protestors. The [president expressed concern about the protests but quipped](#): "At least that horrible night made you famous."

Three years ago, Sortor was a 24-year-old, little-known political operative in Lexington. Now, at 27, he's one of the most popular conservative voices on X, [where he has 1.2 million followers](#). Sortor, who was raised in Louisville, has more followers on X than virtually any other Kentuckian, including the combined totals for Gov. Andy Beshear, actress Ashley Judd, country music star Chris Stapleton and U.S. Rep. James Comer.

The sequence of events in Portland encapsulated Sortor's career: confrontational, viral social media content; unabashed support both for and from Trump; and an arrest.

It was not Sortor's first arrest.



WHITE HOUSE

Nick Sortor, right in a blue suit, speaks to President Donald Trump at a White House roundtable discussion in October.

In fact, due to ongoing legal troubles in Kentucky, Sortor would be subject to arrest again and jail time if he returned to his native state.

He has been charged twice and convicted once for driving under the influence in Kentucky, was arrested for menacing a police officer in downtown Lexington and was put on probation after pleading guilty to criminal mischief for an incident with a woman who accused him of being violent.

Through most of his rise as an influencer crisscrossing the country, he's been absconding on that probation sentence and has had an active in-state warrant for his arrest.

In an Oct. 28 interview with the Herald-Leader, he said that was news to him.

"I'm not aware of this," Sortor said. "I guess the only thing I can say is that I will handle it. I'll have to talk to an attorney now."

Sortor's probation sentence began in January 2022, and the initial warrant for his arrest for absconding was issued June 2023, according to Kentucky court records.

Sortor's probation officer sought a nationwide warrant for his arrest in early October for skipping his probation for more than two years. That request was denied by the court, but his in-state pickup for a 90-day jail sentence remains.

Sortor, who now travels regularly and has a home base in Washington, could be arrested and detained in Kentucky at any time.

TRUMP TO SORTOR: I HAVE YOU!

In a social media ecosystem that rewards [emotional](#), [partisan](#) and [outrage-inducing](#) content — and a platform in [X that has recently taken a rightward turn](#) — Sortor has thrived.

Sortor's online account is best known for diehard, often [crass](#), [pro-Trump commentary](#) and on-scene video content from major news events, like the Portland protests.

He's also helped boost the president's political fortunes, according to Trump himself.

"Thank you for being a social media warrior in the fight to save our country from the Radical Left," [Trump wrote in a letter to Sortor two months before his 2024 election victory](#). "Comrade Kamala has the Fake News, Big Tech, the Deep State swamp creatures, but I have YOU!"

Beyond Portland, he's been on the ground interviewing survivors of disasters, as well as officials, bashing Democrats and rooting for Trump-aligned Republicans in the wake of 2023's East Palestine, Ohio, train derailment, Maui, Hawaii fires, and other high-profile events.

Though his niche is on-the-ground dispatches from scenes like Portland and East Palestine, the majority of his posts aggregate content with a strong pro-Trump, MAGA spin. For instance, he posted another user's video of Melania Trump at a rally in the lead-up to the 2024 election with his own commentary.

"Melania Trump is what a REAL First Lady looks like! Not a power hungry witch like Jill Biden," [he wrote](#).

About 18,000 accounts reposted it. The number of likes: 135,000.

us Melania Trump is what a REAL First Lady looks like!

Not a power hungry witch like Jill Biden

Make Melania First Lady Again! pic.twitter.com/Bsh8gcVU4b

— Nick Sortor (@nicksortor) [October 27, 2024](#)

Tim Weninger, a computer science professor at Notre Dame University who studies social media, said Sortor is part of a growing number of news content creators on X and other social media platforms more focused on heightening partisan outrage than sharing facts or their honest assessment of the news.

"They trade in indignation and hyperbole," Weninger said. "It works, because humans really like outrage. It motivates us and drives our blood pressure, so there's gonna be a market for this kind of stuff.

"No one's interested in sober analysis of reality — that's boring."

SORTOR ON HIS ARREST RECORD

Tracking the course of most of his rise, Sortor has been skipping on his probation in Kentucky.

In a report filed Oct. 6, a Fayette County probation officer wrote that Sortor has had an active warrant for his arrest in Kentucky since June 2023. The officer sought to issue a nationwide pickup for Sortor, meaning that arrests in places like Portland and at the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, where he had a medical episode in a ride-share and responding officers saw he had a warrant, would lead to transports back to Kentucky.

That probation resulted from a case where he pleaded guilty to criminal mischief in the 3rd degree. He was originally charged with 2nd-degree burglary, a felony, following a November 2020 altercation with a woman who accused Sortor of being violent, according to court records.

According to the initial police citation, the woman said Sortor called her 27 times, sent harassing text messages and took her dog before returning to her home, where he attempted to make sexual advances and retrieve his laptop.

“The suspect then put his foot between the door and doorway so she couldn’t close it, forced his way back inside, grabbed the victim by her hair, and pulled her outside the apartment. He then went back inside to retrieve his laptop. The victim stated the suspect slapped her in the face as he was leaving,” the citation reads.

Sortor claims that the case’s amendment down to third-degree criminal mischief, a misdemeanor, is a reflection of the lack of evidence for that account.

Sortor also got a boost via character statements. One came from a young woman who said the allegations were out of character and another came from a widow whose veteran husband died of COVID-19 days after the birth of their second child; Sortor [helped raise \\$100,000 for them](#).

He told the Herald-Leader he would not have taken the plea deal now, but given that he was younger and had less financial independence, the plea deal for a lower-level offense seemed like a no-brainer compared to the original felony charge.

Though the consequences of that arrest have lingered, it is far from Sortor’s only brush with law enforcement in Kentucky.

Outside of seven lower-level traffic violations from 2019 to 2022, Sortor has been charged twice with driving under the influence, and convicted in one of those cases.

In one January 2021 incident, according to a police citation, a 2014 Maserati Quattroporte driven by Sortor was seen losing control and crashing into “multiple occupied dwellings” on High Street in downtown Lexington.

An open alcohol container and multiple pill bottles prescribed to Sortor were found in the vehicle, per the citation. He refused a blood test to determine his blood alcohol level.

“Upon locating the suspect a short distance away, officers observed that the individual showed signs of intoxication, including slurred speech, bloodshot eyes, and a strong odor of alcohol,” the citation reads.

Sortor’s charges for driving under the influence and leaving the scene of an accident were amended down. He pleaded guilty only to reckless driving, driving with a suspended/revoked license and failure to report an accident.

After an incident early Sept. 9, 2022, in Franklin County, Sortor was charged and later convicted of driving under the influence.

Driving a vintage 1979 Pontiac Firebird, Sortor was spotted rolling through a stop sign in downtown Frankfort. According to the arrest citation, Sortor refused both a breathalyzer at the scene and another blood alcohol test at Franklin County Regional Jail.

Sortor was also charged with menacing after an incident between himself and a Lexington police officer downtown early July 24, 2022.

“(He) intentionally and unlawfully placed me in fear of imminent physical injury,” the officer wrote.

That charge was dismissed months later.

In speaking about some of his arrests, Sortor said he was not interested in giving excuses.

“You’ve made mistakes in the past, but you learn from them and move forward, I guess,” Sortor said.

NICK SORTOR’S ORIGINS

Sortor’s first foray into politics began with a social media post — but not from his account.

Andrew Cooperrider, a conservative influencer focused on state politics and former Kentucky candidate who was in the news for refusing to comply with COVID-19 restrictions at his

Lexington coffee shop, asked for help printing out thousands of signatures in support of a petition to impeach Beshear early 2021.

Sortor offered to help. A real estate agent at the time, he had access to the business's industrial printers.

"I went to Office Depot, and we bought out, like, all their paper and all their toner," Sortor recalled.

He even rented a U-Haul truck to deliver the thousands of signatures.

"He used their printers to print off boxes and boxes of these petitions. So, we were pulling out all these boxes on a dolly, wheeling them out, and the office admin sees what's going on," Cooperrider said. "Long story short, they end up firing him for it."

The incident closed the door on Sortor's time as a Realtor at Rector Hayden. But it opened one in the so-called [Liberty wing of Kentucky GOP politics](#), which generally aligns itself with U.S. Rep. Thomas Massie, a contrarian Libertarian-leaning Republican in Northern Kentucky who has repeatedly drawn the ire of Trump.



ANNA MONEYMAKER · GETTY IMAGES

Conservative influencer Nick Sortor holds up an American flag recovered from protests in Portland, Oregon, during a roundtable discussion at the White House in Washington on Oct. 8. Sortor was arrested for disorderly conduct during a protest against the Trump administration's immigration policies.

It was an unorthodox turn in a young professional career that had an unorthodox start. After graduating in 2016 from Trinity High School in Louisville, a large private Catholic school, Sortor skipped college to develop an online gaming app.

The money behind the app, according to Sortor's telling, was Louisville native and famed pizza mogul "Papa" John Schnatter. News stories from [Sortor's past](#) as a wunderkind high school entrepreneur had caught the Papa Johns founder's attention, Sortor said.

But when Schnatter became [embroiled in a controversy](#) in mid-2018 over his use of a racial slur during an internal sensitivity training, the funding dried up.

After his real estate career was cut short, Sortor developed strong ties with Cooperrider, assisting his coffee shop, Brewed, with its online platform and later helping manage [Cooperrider's ultimately unsuccessful](#) 2022 campaign [for state senate](#). He also assisted other Liberty-aligned Republican politicians with website creation and harsh attack mailers in GOP primaries.

He regularly posted on X, lambasting both Democrats like Beshear and [Republicans he saw as too moderate on issues](#) like vaccines. Former state Sen. Ralph Alvarado, who is now running for Congress in Central Kentucky, and former state Senate Majority Floor Leader Damon Thayer, were frequent targets.

But Sortor didn't really have an audience at the time.

"I didn't even know that he criticized me. He never really was on my radar screen, to be honest with you," Thayer told the Herald-Leader, adding that he thinks Sortor is now doing "pretty amazing work."

ON-SCENE IN EAST PALESTINE & COMMENTARY

Sortor's audience got a drastic bump early 2023 when he drove from Kentucky to East Palestine a working-class, small town on Ohio's border with Pennsylvania. He went to see the aftermath of [a train derailment involving a Norfolk Southern railcar full of chemicals](#), which led to a fiery explosion and resident outcry over exposure to the hazardous materials.

"I kept seeing these photos of dark, thick mushroom clouds. It looked like the town had been nuked, and there was no media coverage at all, especially on the national level. I was like, 'I'm going to go see this for myself,'" Sortor said.

Then the coverage came, in part because of Sortor's work, done one heavily capitalized tweet at a time.

"Even MORE proof that the EPA is LYING to the people of East Palestine. THIS WATER IS INSANELY CONTAMINATED," Sortor wrote in a post accompanied by a [video showing chemicals surfacing in a woman's backyard creek](#).

Even MORE proof that the EPA is LYING to the people of East Palestine.

THIS WATER IS INSANELY CONTAMINATED. pic.twitter.com/rNlNxxBTdD

— Nick Sortor (@nicksortor) [February 16, 2023](#)

It drew millions of views — 11.8 million as of November 2025 — and caught the eye of Tucker Carlson, a former Fox News host who had Sortor on his show; the national media; and the White House.

“That sent the federal government into total damage control mode. And that’s when you started seeing national media outlets putting people on the ground,” Sortor said.

Sortor became the leading voice criticizing the federal government, then led by Democratic President Joe Biden, in its response to the catastrophe.

Sortor thinks that may have been a tipping point in the lead-up to Trump’s 2024 victory. Biden’s absence there was a common gripe among Republicans, and Trump capitalized on the attention by going to East Palestine himself.

“That was pretty embarrassing for the Biden administration and the Biden campaign. And I’m not sure that they (the Trump team) would have done that had it not been for me covering that story in the way that I did,” Sortor said.

The attention of the country shifted toward East Palestine, and Trump’s trip to the rural, working class enclave stood in contrast to Biden, who [didn’t visit until more than a year later](#).

The negative impacts on residents were real and later acknowledged in different ways. Norfolk Southern [paid out \\$1.7 billion](#) in settlement funds, and [preliminary research from the University of Kentucky](#) confirmed residents’ fears of health problems due to the derailment.

Sortor’s follower count took off, and he became a regular on-scene contributor for right wing outlets like Fox News, [Steve Bannon’s War Room](#) and [the conspiracy-laden InfoWars](#), in addition to some appearances on moderate to left-leaning outlets like [CNN](#).

The common thread on Sortor’s conservative media appearances was indignation. There is a market for independent journalists on the right with this attitude when there is a left-of-center government to blame, said Weninger, the Notre Dame professor.

He called it a “cottage industry.”

“(The networks) have to find someone that reinforces the story they want to tell. It’s a way of kind of laundering the message through a different messenger. So, you can’t blame Fox or Newsmax or even NBC for the reporting, because, well, they just found some guy and that’s what he’s seeing,” Weninger said.

“If the angle of Fox is, ‘The protests in Portland are bad,’ you need a reporter that has this kind of perspective,” he added.

One of Sortor’s friends via the Liberty wing of the Kentucky GOP, Rep. TJ Roberts, R-Burlington, begs to differ. Roberts, who [has encouraged followers to hate “the legacy media”](#) and has been the [subject of coverage](#) for his own social media posts, says Sortor’s content is more honest than mainstream media because he’s open about his perspective.

“The thing I admire the most about Nick is his authenticity. He’s never going to sugarcoat what he believes,” Roberts said. “He will tell you the truth — at least as he sees it.”

Kathryn Montalbano, an assistant professor of media law and ethics at the University of Kentucky’s School of Journalism and Media, said Sortor appears to be “very committed to Trump,” but not the truth. That’s a big difference between his work and that of a journalist at a mainstream outlet, she said.

“When we think about accountability in terms of fact checking, verifying sources, it doesn’t seem like there’s much of that going on. It’s just kind of spewing out what is trending on far-right media. ... It seems like there is no sense of accountability to the truth, but rather to his followers,” she said.

Montalbano said Sortor’s account fits in with the increasing amount of echo chambers on social media, falling into an “extremely polarized space where there is just no exchange of ideas across political spectrums.”

Sortor did not see himself as contributing to polarization or increased partisanship when asked to address one recent post.

Last month, he shared a video of a [Department of Homeland Security agent shoving a woman to the ground](#) and then retreating to an unmarked van. The woman had [previously tried to unmask the agent](#).

“LMAO! Some woman tried grabbing a DHS agent in Chicago and she QUICKLY found out why that’s a stupid idea. Hope that pavement tasted good, lady,” [he wrote](#), punctuating the post with a crying laughing emoji.

🔥 LMAO! Some woman tried grabbing a DHS agent in Chicago and she QUICKLY found out why that’s a stupid idea

Hope that pavement tasted good, lady 🤔 pic.twitter.com/sqQqC3EKSc

— Nick Sortor (@nicksortor) [October 25, 2025](#)

Sortor did not directly answer if he thought posts like that one worsened polarization, instead focusing on his disapproval of the woman’s actions. Though he spoke much more at length about his disaster work, he offered a brief summation of how he views his commentary work.

“I feel like I have a platform that I can use to give people that don’t otherwise have a voice, a voice on issues that are happening on the ground that the national media won’t touch,” Sortor said.

CRISS-CROSSING THE COUNTRY

Sortor had always been drawn to disasters and big events, but after East Palestine, he made a point to do something similar when he could.

In the aftermath of fires that devastated Maui and killed more than 100 people in mid-2023, Sortor set up there for two months.

He posted repeatedly about the number of missing people estimated at the time, calling it [a “coverup.”](#) In [a post that was shared more than 20,000 times](#), he hounded the Maui County mayor at a press conference over the number of children dead.

“THIS IS A COVER-UP. CHILDREN WERE BURNED ALIVE,” Sortor wrote two weeks after the fire. “WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN, MR. MAYOR?”

Of [the 102 killed by the fires](#), three were children.

🔥 MAUI POLICE HEADLOCK ME FOR ASKING THE MAYOR ABOUT MISSING CHILDREN

MAYOR BISSEN KNOWS THE ANSWER, BUT HE’S HIDING IT.

The mainstream media have been REFUSING to press the Mayor on this, so residents and I

started pressing him HARD for the past SEVERAL DAYS.

He's been... pic.twitter.com/ewZgl7lwz4

— Nick Sortor (@nicksortor) [August 23, 2023](#)

Sortor's coverage also led to an online feud with Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, a Hawaii native, months later.

Sortor, ostensibly [misunderstanding the villain-like role of a "heel" in professional wrestling](#), wrote that a crowd in Las Vegas at a professional wrestling event was [booing Johnson because they were upset](#) he and Oprah Winfrey, [with whom Johnson started a relief fund](#), didn't spend more to help.

"I typically refrain from responding to toxic, false clickbait garbage like this because I hate dignifying (expletive) with a response, but when you use Hawaii's tragic events to draw attention to yourself I won't stay quiet," [Johnson wrote in a response to Sortor](#).

Still, the Maui coverage grew Sortor's audience.

In September 2024, when historic flooding hit Western North Carolina — killing 117 there, washing out several roads and isolating entire communities — Sortor approached the disaster much like he did Maui, but added a new wrinkle: direct aid.

Sortor arrived armed with his own Starlink, the portable satellite-connected internet kit from SpaceX, a company founded by X owner and world's richest man Elon Musk. When he first arrived, he lent his own to first responders and saw that they could benefit, too.

"I was posting about the need for Starlinks and such, and Elon Musk had an executive at SpaceX reach out to me and ask me how they could help," Sortor said.

A donor footed the bill for [a private jet with 30 Starlinks](#), and Sortor started managing a distribution network all over the state.

Sortor could do all this because he's independent; about 98% of his income, he said, comes from advertising revenue on social media.

"I can go to a place and not even come back with a story because I don't answer to anybody," he said. "So, if I go to a place and I determine, 'OK, the best way that I can help here is by utilizing my contacts and using my reach to do things like disaster relief,' then I'm going to do that instead."

Still, Sortor's trademark indignation at the government response to the last major disaster of the Biden presidency continued throughout the Helene recovery.

Sortor responded to an Asheville resident who called the government response ["visible and vigorous,"](#) claiming he was ["full of \(expletive\)."](#)

Non-Asheville resident here, who has spent the past week traversing the region feeding and re-connecting rural communities in Western North Carolina via Starlink:

You're full of sht. <https://t.co/X0cwFW2xDQ> pic.twitter.com/2PboTp8mRe

— Nick Sortor (@nicksortor) [October 5, 2024](#)

He also called for the impeachment of former Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.

“WTF? DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas spent just SIX HOURS in ravaged Western North Carolina before bolting back to DC to get high-end sushi at (Washington restaurant) Nobu. This guy is a DISGRACE, and is constantly spitting in the faces of Americans,” [Sortor wrote](#).

Sortor’s posts from the aftermath of the biggest natural disaster of the second Trump era — a horrific flooding event in Texas, a red state, this past July that killed 135 people, including several children at summer camp — struck a different chord.

He heaped [praise on the Trump administration’s response](#) as well as that of GOP Texas Gov. Greg Abbott.

“Texas has been handling this operation MASTERFULLY, especially given the devastation. Hundreds of game wardens, state troopers, and National Guard all RAPIDLY deployed. And they’re doing a fantastic job,” [Sortor wrote](#).

Abbott later [approached Sortor to commend him](#) for his work. The next day, Sortor was [riding in a helicopter with Abbott surveying the damage](#) and praising the governor.

 EXCLUSIVE — WHAT HAPPENED AT CAMP MYSTIC: I joined Gov. Greg Abbott to survey the catastrophic flooding in the Texas Hill Country aboard a National Guard Blackhawk

Gov. Abbott gives a detailed account how rescuers saved COUNTLESS lives at Camp Mystic, and what made the... pic.twitter.com/TG3jwZ79NR

— Nick Sortor (@nicksortor) [July 10, 2025](#)

Sortor told the Herald-Leader the discrepancy in his messaging was, in part, due to Texas’ wealth as a state.

“They have a ton of resources that they can shift very quickly,” Sortor said. “The state of North Carolina does not have that luxury. Federal responses are slow as hell — always. And I don’t believe that is changing anytime soon. So, FEMA is hugely bureaucratic, and they’re not very good at pre-positioning assets.”

This month, the head of FEMA resigned following reporting that he was unreachable during the height of the floods. [According to the Washington Post](#), that issue was a key reason it took 72 hours for FEMA to authorize spending on specialized search-and-rescue crews in the wake of the flood.

Sortor claims he’s not just a mouthpiece for Trump or the GOP.

In some ways, he has tried to differentiate himself from the conservative media pack. He’s [regularly criticized](#) the [Trump administration’s handling](#) of the files related to late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, [but he’s been resolute in backing Trump](#) himself. He often hits Republicans seen as too moderate by the rest of the MAGA base, and [he’s called out fellow MAGA influencers for taking money from big soda companies](#) to spread their talking points.

“Nick is adamant about the idea having an ‘R’ next to your name is not enough,” Roberts said. “He’s not a partisan hack by any stretch. I mean, you go through his feed, and he calls out Republicans who are betraying the principles that they campaigned on regularly, and people admire that.”

Weninger said Sortor’s success is indicative of one of Musk’s changes to the X algorithm dictating the content users see.

Before Musk's purchase, he said, prior management weighted the algorithm toward posts and accounts it deemed more truthful. Musk did away with that in the early days of his ownership.

Robert Kahne, a member of the Kentucky Democratic State Central Executive Committee and co-host of ["My Old Kentucky Podcast,"](#) said the cost has been steep.

"The story of this guy, specifically, may not be as much about him as it is about these platforms," Kahne said. "They've stopped being a place to create this town square and have instead been places that incentivize partisanship and screaming into the void.

"I have no idea who he actually is, what makes him unique, he just seems like one of a billion other people that I've seen before. I just can't imagine reading that stuff and finding it interesting on any level. It's just completely boring to me."