

Having trouble viewing this email? [View it in your web browser](#)

## — News From The States —

# EVENING WRAP



By [Sean Scully](#)

It's Wednesday, which means not only are we half way through the work week, but also that much of the country is facing some kind of natural disaster: water, wind, fire and everything else. Just another Hump Day on planet Earth.

### The Big Takeaway

**The first clear reference in the scientific literature to climate change appears to have come in 1896**, when [Swedish physicist Svante Arrheniu](#), building on nearly a century of atmospheric research, calculated that doubling the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere would raise the world's temperature by up to 6 degrees Celsius — almost 43 degrees Fahrenheit.

Congress acted swiftly, taking just 126 years to pass its [first comprehensive piece](#) of regulation to fight human-caused climate change, the peculiarly named [Inflation Reduction Act of 2022](#).

Problem solved, right?

(Editor's note: No, not solved).

So here we are.



*Us, maybe.*  
(Getty Images)

**In Florida, Hurricane Idalia became the eighth major storm to hit the Gulf Coast in six years, [the Florida Phoenix reports](#).** The storm struck along the northern part of the state, in the Big Bend region, where the panhandle meets the Florida peninsula, an unusual target for hurricanes. Fed by record-warm seawater in the area, the storm briefly reached Category 4, the second strongest category, but struck land as a Category 3, with storm surges predicted as high as 16 feet. It was the strongest storm to hit the region in 100 years.

“Don’t put your life at risk by doing anything dumb at this point,” Gov. Ron DeSantis said in a pre-landfall briefing. “This thing is powerful. If you’re inside, just hunker down until it gets past you. You don’t want to be messing around with these winds.”

**In Tampa, where flooding shut down two of three bridges connecting the city to Pinellas County, the storm was an unwelcome addition to the predicted “king tide,”** unusually high tides that were set to hit just a few hours after the hurricane passed, [the Phoenix reported](#).

“There is a lot of water, and unfortunately there’s no time for that to recede before we get the King Tide in a few hours,” Tampa Mayor Jane Castor told [CBS News](#). “So we are looking at additional flooding here in our area. We have about 126 miles of waterfront in our city and so a lot of area to take this water on.”

**Florida wasn’t the only state fretting about Idalia as it moved north toward Georgia and**

**the Carolinas.** In North Carolina, hundreds of hog and poultry farms, landfills and hazardous waste sites could be inundated by a major storm were it to clip the southeastern part of the state, [NC Newsline reported](#).

“The brunt of floodwaters can release chemicals, waste and other hazards into the environment, jeopardizing public health,” Newsline wrote, offering tips to avoid contaminated flood and well water.

**So did climate change cause Hurricane Idalia?** [No, scientists say](#). But it is quite clear that as the Earth warms, the intensity of such storms increases, and perhaps even their numbers as well.

“There has been a substantial increase in most measures of Atlantic hurricane activity since the early 1980s, the period during which high-quality satellite data are available,” the authors of the [Third National Climate Assessment wrote](#). “These include measures of intensity, frequency, and duration as well as the number of strongest (Category 4 and 5) storms.”



*A firefighter battles the Lookout Fire in Lane County on Aug. 24, one of a dozen fires burning across Oregon.  
(Courtesy of InciWeb)*

**In Oregon, the problem isn't too much water. It's too little.** The Pacific Northwest, usually famous for its damp, cool climate, has been baking under heat domes and suffering drought the last few summers. With that hot, dry weather comes a new scourge: wildfire.

Portland officials are keeping a close eye on fires burning in the rural watershed that provides water to the metro area of about 1 million people, [the Oregon Capital Chronicle reports](#).

“Fire in the watershed always poses a risk to our water supply, and weather conditions can change quickly,” the Portland Water Bureau said in a news release. “We’re developing multiple contingency plans, so we are prepared in the event we are forced to evacuate staff from the watershed.”

The Camp Creek Fire is burning about a mile from a key reservoir and just 2 miles from the water treatment plant.

“If the fire were to put the supply at risk, we may need to rely only on our limited groundwater, which can’t meet all our current summer demand,” Water Bureau Director Gabriel Solmer said. “Should we get to that position, we will ask for the help of all water users to reduce their water use.”

The lightning-sparked blaze is just one of a dozen fires burning across the state this week.

**In neighboring Washington, Lands Commissioner Hilary Franz is worried by news that the Department of Corrections is planning to close the Larch Corrections Center** in southwest Washington and move its inmates to other parts of the state, [the Washington State Standard reports](#).

Why would the lands commissioner care? Because **about 80 inmates at Larch help the state fight wildfires**, and their new facilities are not located as strategically as the old one. There are 27 fires burning across Washington, six of them considered large, [fire officials say](#).



*Bulldozers work overnight in Louisiana’s Beauregard Parish to create a firebreak in an attempt to contain a wildfire that’s consumed more than 30,000 acres.*

*(Beauregard Parish Sheriff’s Office)*

**In Louisiana, meanwhile, officials have responded to more than 600 fires this summer,** reports [the Louisiana Illuminator](#), burning more than 60,000 acres, causing several deaths and forcing evacuations in populated areas.

The fires are driven by drought and damage from past hurricanes, which uprooted trees that are now dead and drying out on the forest floors.

Even heavy rain early in the week was insufficient to ease the fire danger, Gov. John Bel Edwards said Tuesday.

“The vast majority of that did not fall in southwest Louisiana, and the amount that did fall here was not sufficient to materially change the conditions,” the governor said. “No one should labor under the misapprehension that we’re back to normal in Louisiana — far from it.”

**More from the Welcome to the New Normal file:** [\(Hawaii\) The Great Lahaina Fire Of 1919 Has Eerie Parallels To The Recent Blaze ... \(Vermont\) Nearly a dozen households in a Rutland neighborhood still have no power after Aug. 4 flooding ... \(Maryland\) PSC chair wants to 'lower the temperature' on siting disputes over renewable energy projects ... In wake of oil train legal win, Colorado mountain towns dream of passenger rail ... Their water is undrinkable. So these West Texas residents have taken matters into their own hands ... \(New Mexico\) FEMA finalizes rules for paying nearly \\$4 billion to Hermits Peak-Calf Canyon Fire victims](#)



## State of Our Democracy

**Just over half of the states — 26, plus the District of Columbia — permit some form of direct democracy, [allowing residents to place ballot measures or referendums before voters](#).**

These votes are generally used to enact a new law or override an existing law passed by legislators.

Although they usually talk a good game about the virtues of popular will, politicians in fact mostly hate it when voters overrule them or force them to do something they don't want to do.

The fight over ballot questions has gained new urgency in recent years, as lawmakers (mostly but not exclusively Republicans) try to enact policies that are popular with their political bases but are unpopular with the general public.



*Ohio voters protesting lawmakers' efforts to make sure they couldn't overturn their unpopular policies.  
(Photo by Graham Stokes for Ohio Capital Journal)*

This is particularly true on the question of abortion, which the Supreme Court kicked back to the states in 2022 by overturning the Roe v. Wade decision that guaranteed the right to abortion.

Since then, Republican-led legislatures have pushed aggressively to limit or ban abortion in many states, and activists have been challenging the ability of the public to get drugs that induce abortions.

This is generally unpopular with the public, and advocates have been fighting to get reproductive rights measures on the ballot wherever they are allowed to do so.

Republican officials have turned to an interesting tactic to thwart this flood of popular democracy: using biased or inaccurate language to describe the measure on the ballot, thereby confusing voters, [the States Newsroom national desk reports](#).

In Ohio, backers of an abortion rights measure filed suit Monday, complaining that state officials used “deceptive” language for the upcoming ballot measure.

“But it isn’t just the Buckeye State that’s lately seeing fierce battles over the once-obscure topic of ballot language,” our democracy reporter wrote. “In recent weeks, officials in Missouri — where another abortion-rights measure is at issue — and Idaho also have been accused in lawsuits of seeking to thwart citizen initiatives they oppose by using biased and negative ballot language to describe the issue to voters. Arkansas last year saw a similar court fight after a state board rejected a proposed ballot measure that had gained the required number of signatures, claiming the ballot language didn’t explain the issue in enough detail.”

Even when courts throw out bad ballot language, as they often do, the process of challenging the wording in a lawsuit increases the time and money involved in bringing ballot questions before the voters, advocates say.

“This has been an escalating effort to attack ballot titles,” said Sarah Walker, director of legal and policy advocacy at the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center, which provides support for progressive ballot measures. “It’s just more of a long trajectory of efforts to undermine the will of the voters. And it shows how far politicians who are out of step with voters are willing to go to consolidate their power.”

This has raised the profile of secretaries of state, the officials usually responsible for administering elections and, therefore, in most states responsible for the language that will describe a measure on the ballot and in the voter information guides. The once-obscure and technical offices have become subject to fierce partisan election battles.

“A politicized, partisan secretary of state can completely distort public understanding of a ballot question through their control of the summary language,” said Kevin Johnson, executive director of Election Reformers Network, which backs reforms aimed at removing partisanship from election administration. “We would never accept a referee playing for one team in sports, and we shouldn’t in elections either.”

And it’s not just abortion that’s at stake. In Idaho, where the responsibility for drafting ballot titles falls to the attorney general rather than secretary of state, the issue is voting itself. A coalition of activists successfully sued Attorney General Raúl Labrador over his description of a measure to create an open primary system, which would allow residents of any party to vote in any primary election.

Labrador, who has made no secret of his opposition, drafted the title to say that the measure would “replace voter selection of party nominees with nonparty blanket primary,” implying precisely the opposite effect of the proposed law, advocates say. A court later agreed and made him change it.



And words matter. A 2021 study found that voters were almost twice as likely to back a hypothetical tax to fund education when it was presented as additional “one cent per dollar,” rather than as “a 22% increase.”

“As a general matter,” wrote the study’s author, University of Georgia political scientist Ted Rossier, “state institutions that are responsible for writing ballot questions, as well as the courts that hear challenges thereto, must remain mindful of the potential for nefarious manipulation of the process.”



*Republican lawmakers and House staff members hold back Tennessee House Majority Leader William Lamberth of Portland after Lamberth turned to move towards Rep. Justin Pearson, D-Memphis on Aug. 29, 2023.*

*(Photo: John Partipilo)*

**And now an update to a story we brought you yesterday.** The Tennessee Legislature adjourned Tuesday after more than a week of a special session called by the governor in the wake of a school shooting. The entire session transpired with hardly a finger lifted to address the question of gun regulation, [but as we described yesterday](#), lawmakers did find time to silence a Democratic member who wanted to discuss the issue.

After our deadline, however, news broke that the session had in fact concluded on an even

stupider note. [The Tennessee Lookout reports](#) that the session ended with slight violence, when House Speaker Cameron Sexton, as he was leaving the dais, [bumped into state Rep. Justin Pearson](#), who held a sign saying “Protect kids not guns.”

“He leaned his shoulder into me and then one of his minions pushed me toward the clerk,” said Pearson, a Memphis Democrat who was expelled from the House last spring after he was accused of breaking decorum rules, then returned to the body and re-elected this summer, the Lookout wrote.

Sexton, however, described the encounter differently, saying he was in a crush of people, including his own security, when he was jostled from behind then bumped into Pearson. Then, he said, an “irate” Pearson “pops me from the right side.”

[Video of the encounter](#) shows Sexton bumping into Pearson, but it is not clear whether he did it deliberately or was pushed as he claims.

**More from the Political Battles files:** [New initiative petitions seek to add rape, incest exceptions to Missouri abortion law ... \(Texas\) For Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, Ken Paxton’s impeachment trial is a legacy-defining test ... Support Our Schools says it has enough signatures to reach 2024 Nebraska ballot ... Lawsuit arguing racial gerrymandering in Michigan’s legislative districts to go to trial](#)



## From The Newsrooms

- [\(Indiana\) Bernard, Rokita opt against appeal in licensing case; matter now closed](#)
- [Affordable housing investment falls short in Oklahoma, report shows](#)
- [Oregon has process to prevent gun violence but it’s not widely used, report finds](#)
- [\(Alaska\) Anchorage trail projects seen as modest but positive steps in 500-mile Alaska Traverse plan](#)
- [\(Iowa\) Bankruptcy trustee objects to UI’s plans for a speedy purchase of Mercy Hospital](#)



## One Last Thing

**The 2019 film “Yesterday” was a modest hit, a romantic comedy released to cautiously positive reviews**, earning more than \$154 million at the box office and scoring a decent 63%

approval on the ratings site [Rotten Tomatoes](#).

But two viewers say they were tricked into watching the film and asked a federal court to allow them to bring a class-action lawsuit against movie company Universal on behalf of all such deceived moviegoers.

They said that the fact that the trailer featured a brief clip of actress Ana de Armas that did not appear in the final cut of the film had falsely led them to believe she starred in it, [pop culture site Jezebel reports](#).

“Hilariously, the suit goes on to state that Universal ‘used’ de Armas’ likeness to dupe more people into watching because the two leads, Himesh Patel and Lily James, weren’t noteworthy enough to garner a significant audience,” Jezebel wrote.

A judge didn’t buy it and dismissed the suit this week.



*Hi, everyone! I am totally not in this film.*

*(Photo by Amy Sussman/Getty Images)*

# News From The States

---

A PROJECT OF STATES NEWSROOM

Did someone forward you this newsletter?

[SUBSCRIBE](#) | [LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR NEWSROOMS](#) | [FOLLOW](#)

Share this post:



---

Copyright © 2023 [States Newsroom](#), all rights reserved.

1414 Raleigh Rd #127 | Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27517

[info@newsfromthestates.com](mailto:info@newsfromthestates.com)

*You are receiving this email because you opted in via our website or Facebook signup form.*

TO MANAGE YOUR ACCOUNT, CLICK ON "UNSUBSCRIBE" BELOW

[Unsubscribe](#) or [Manage Your Preferences](#)