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— News From The States —

EVENING WRAP



By [Sean Scully](#)

Welcome to Thursday. As the work week winds down, let's check in on the latest skirmishing in the Culture Wars, shall we?



The Big Takeaway

What should have been a routine meeting of the trustees of the Ozark-Dale County library in Alabama turned into a three-hour argument over LGBTQ+-themed books and the constitutionality of banning books from the shelves, [the Alabama Reflector reports](#).

An overflow crowd of more than 100 participated in the acrimonious debate. At issue were two books, "[The Mirror Season](#)," by Anna Marie-McLemore, and "[Only Mostly Devastated](#)," by Sophie Gonzalez, published by MacMillan and identified as being for ages 13-18.

The books, available currently in the young adult literature section, were the subject of complaints by two local elected officials, Dale County Commissioner Adam Enfinger and Ozark Mayor Mark Blankenship, who argued that the content was inappropriate for young people.

"I'm telling you, it is terrible when you read this stuff, and we do not need them in this library," Blankenship told the trustees.

Other speakers echoed their complaints, variously suggesting that the books be removed entirely or moved to an older or restricted section.

One resident said "LGBTQ is an abomination to God" before being halted by trustees, who

argued that her word constituted a personal attack.

Others leapt to the defense of the books.

“This government must represent all of the people of Ozark, not just the majority,” said Alden Rocha, an adult library volunteer who identified herself as a conservative Christian. “People in the LGBTQ community are taxpayers too, and they should have access to the books that they and their kids request.”

Even the trustees got in on the act. Trustee Monica Carroll read a passage from “The Mirror Season” that she described as “sexually explicit,” after first warning the audience to remove children from the room.

Trustees did not decide the fate of the books after the lengthy session. Instead, they will likely discuss at their Sept. 20 meeting a proposal to require parents to sign a consent form before their children can access certain books. But they said they have to talk to their lawyers first.



*The young adult section in the Ozark-Dale County Library. Scary, right?
(Alabama Reflector Photo by Stew Milne)*

In Louisiana, meanwhile, the council in conservative St. Tammany Parish is trying very hard not to get drawn into the library wars – and not entirely succeeding.

At a meeting this week, the council discussed a resolution directing the parish library to draft a policy to comply with a new state law that requires libraries to adopt policies restricting minors' access to certain materials, [the Louisiana Illuminator reports](#).

“Multiple members, including Councilman Mike Smith, who authored the resolution, said it was essentially pointless because the library is already bound by law to adopt these policies,” the Illuminator wrote. “It has already incorporated and even exceeded some of the law’s requirements of its own volition,” he said. Some council members said they simply favor restricting sensitive books, particularly those with LGBTQ+ themes, to a special section, similar to the way video rental stores used to separate R-rated movies. They were not favoring banning anything, they said.

Council Chairman Jakey Airey, however, pointed out that many of the pending challenges to books in the library were demanding the complete removal of the materials.

“When Airey made that point, it was met with immediate pushback from conservative activists in the crowd, many of whom carried neon-colored signs reading ‘Protect Children,’ and ‘Listen to Parents,’” the Illuminator wrote. “‘That’s not a ban!’ one person shouted.”

In the end, the council took no action, but the topic has become a hot one in the ongoing race for council members and president.

The Illuminator notes that the conservative group that is behind most of the challenges to books in the parish library and around the state “has also actively campaigned against renewal of a library property tax, calling for the system to be defunded.”



Yes! No! Opinions abound at the St. Tammany Parish Council meeting on library books.

(Piper Hutchinson/Louisiana Illuminator)

But libraries are not the only culture battlegrounds of late. In Ohio, a Republican lawmaker wants to give school districts the power to hire chaplains, or accept volunteer services from ministers, [the Ohio Capital Journal reports](#). State Rep. Reggie Stoltzfus, R-Paris Township, was inspired by a similar law in Texas.

“Regardless of their status, however, potential chaplains must go through a background check. The bill insists chaplains ‘may be offered in addition to, but not in lieu of, school counselor services,’” the Capital Journal writes. “The proposal also states chaplains aren’t subject to state licensing or certification.”

Stoltzfus didn’t respond to requests for an interview with the Capital Journal, but elsewhere he has explained that chaplains can assist with the mental health of school children.

Ohio Education Association President Scott DiMauro isn’t so sure that unlicensed clerics are the

best way to deal with the mental health challenges of youth.

“We need mental health specialists, we need fully trained school counselors, school social workers, school nurses,” DiMauro said. “I’m not sure that someone who is a religious chaplain who doesn’t have training to be a mental health support person is necessarily going to help solve that problem.”

Officially speaking, both the Texas law and the Ohio bill are non-sectarian, allowing for chaplains of any religion. The organization behind the Texas law, however, the National School Chaplain Association, which describes itself as a subsidiary of the non-profit Mission Generation, appears to be more specific in its intent.

“Currently Mission Generation chaplains disciple millions of people in 22 countries using the infrastructure of national school systems to bring children to Jesus,” said a fundraising video on Mission Generation’s YouTube channel. “It is exceptionally efficient, costing only 10 cents a year per disciple — literally making every penny count for the gospel.”

More from the Culture Wars Front Lines file: [Tennessee’s anti-drag law faces another suit, this time in Blount County](#) ... [\(North Carolina\) New Charter School Review Board prepares to flex its authority](#) ... [\(Pennsylvania\) Senate bills rekindle fight over Shapiro’s school voucher deal](#) ... [\(Michigan\) Nessel joins amicus brief with other AGs against religious school Title IX exemptions](#) ... [Did Vermont officials quash local school mask mandates? Inquiring feds want to know](#) ... [\(Maryland\) Howard County man pleads guilty to threatening LGBTQ+ advocacy group, admits sending threats to lawmakers](#)



State of Our Democracy

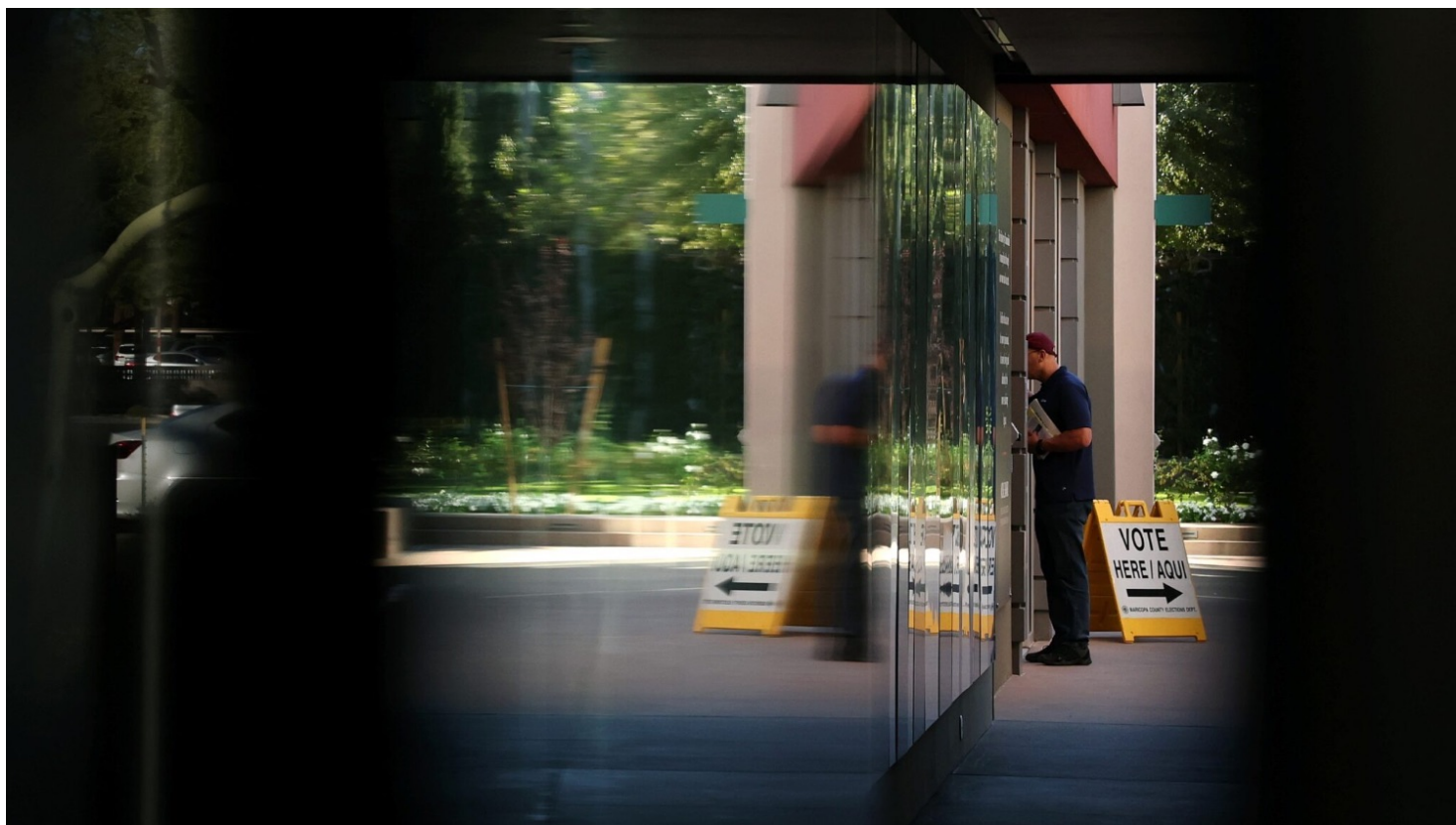
After frittering away virtually every significant statewide office and reducing its legislative majority to a single vote in both chambers, the once dominant Arizona GOP is in a bad way lately. So bad that the party is [effectively broke after fundraising cratered](#), and its leading figures have lost round after round of court actions [in a fruitless effort to overturn last year’s elections](#).

Now the Maricopa County chapter of the GOP has a brilliant idea to make things better: to opt out of the state-funded presidential primary system next year and stage their own balloting, [the Arizona Mirror reports](#).

Better yet, the privately run election would abandon all that tedious early voting and tabulating by

accurate and fast voting machines. No, this election would happen in a single day, and the ballots would be counted by hand.

And the Maricopa County plan would only cost the state party (you remember, the one that is already broke?) \$15 million, according to Republican estimates.



I have an idea. Let's do this the hard way.

(Photo by Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images)

State Republicans were not amused.

“It would be much appreciated if they could tell us where we’re going to get the \$13 (million) to \$15 million that the secretary of state estimates we will need to do what they’re asking us to do, and why we want to spend that money on something other than winning elections,” AZGOP Chairman Jeff DeWit said in a video response.

Maricopa County Republican Chairman Craig Berland, a vocal election denier who [attended election denial celebrity Mike Lindell’s symposium](#) earlier this month, scoffed at the state’s concerns.

“Berland challenged DeWit to stand up for election integrity by pulling out of the state presidential primary to host the party’s own hand-counted election,” the Mirror writes. “Berland said that he

believes the 2022 election for governor was stolen from Kari Lake and that Republican politicians make plenty of promises about election integrity but ‘when the opportunity arises to truly stand, all they do is stand in the way.’”

This is hardly the first time Arizona Republicans have called to do away with machine voting. The state legislature sent to the governor a variety of bills to limit voting and abandon technology. But the governor is now a Democrat, and none of those ideas were signed into law.

Individual counties have also considered reverting to hand counts, a method abandoned up to a century ago.

“The Mohave County Board of Supervisors, which had previously planned to hand count all ballots in the 2024 election, [decided against it](#) in early August after learning that the count would cost more than \$1 million, a cost that Chairman Travis Lingenfelter said the county couldn’t afford,” the Mirror writes. “A large part of that cost, according to Mohave County Elections Director Allen Tempert, would be to [hire 245 workers](#). He also expressed concern at the number of errors workers made during a test hand count of 850 ballots in June.”

More from the Politics is Fun file: [Federal racketeering suit against Missouri gaming company dismissed over lack of standing ... \(New Hampshire\) As housing concerns rise, lawmakers revisit accessory dwelling units ... Georgia Power, state regulators agree to division of Vogtle nuclear plant costs ... \(Ohio\) Democrats call for Bob Young’s removal as chair of House Pensions Committee after second arrest ... 774 new Texas laws go into effect Friday. Here are some that might affect you ... \(Wisconsin\) Republicans unwrap proposals for child care that Democrats call inadequate](#)



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One Last Thing

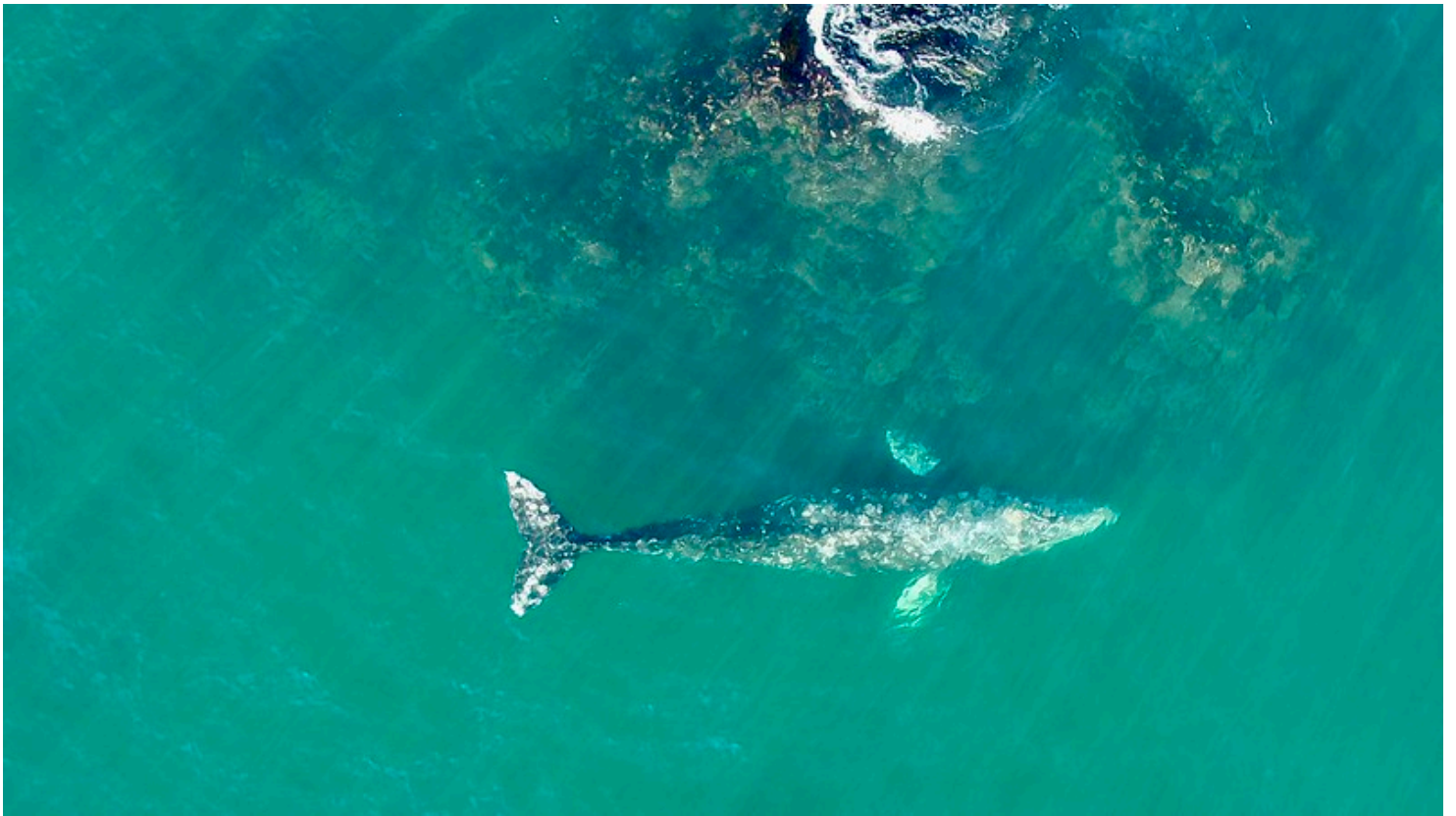
Since at least the 1970s, possibly much earlier, a group of migrating gray whales has peeled off from the main herd and made a pit stop to feed in the shallow waters along the Oregon coast, [reports the Oregon Capital Chronicle](#). The whales migrate between Mexico and the Arctic, and most feed in the deep water along the way.

Nobody is quite sure why the 200 or so animals in the coastal club do this, but they appear to be a related group that repeats the practice generation after generation, based on DNA evidence (gathered by the lucky scientists who get to collect whale poop from the ocean).

One interesting finding by researchers is that the whales that do this are experiencing significant changes in their bodies over time. New research by Oregon State University shows that the Oregon feeders have smaller skulls and are up to 3 feet shorter than their counterparts who stay out in the deep waters to feed.

It's possible that the changes are part of natural evolution to allow the whales to feed in the shallower waters. Or maybe they're responding to the stress of more human contact as they get closer to the coast.

"More research is needed to understand what may be driving the size differences between the two populations," said Leigh Torres, an associate professor at Oregon State and coauthor of the latest study.



*Let's get small, says the whale.
(GEMM Lab, Oregon State University)*

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