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— News From The States —

EVENING WRAP



By [Kate Queram](#)

My criteria for a family vacation was this: Anywhere that is not D.C. in August. (If you know, you know, and you are, probably, [very sweaty](#).) We settled on Lake Erie, which was pleasant and not at all humid and, ultimately, not much of an escape — the weather was pleasant at home the week we were gone, only to soar back into triple digits after we came back. Which figures, really. Nature does what it wants, and what it wants is increasingly at odds with what you might prefer.



The Big Takeaway

Of course, thanks to climate change, oppressive heat is [no longer a regional problem](#). Last month in Wisconsin, days of extreme heat prompted multiple schools to close down for days at a time. Prolonged drought and scorching heat waves have [increased wildfire activity](#) across the state, officials said. On Labor Day, temperatures across the state [neared 100 degrees](#), accompanied by unusually high levels of humidity, experts [told the Wisconsin Examiner](#).



I AM panicking!

(Photo by Isiah Holmes/Wisconsin Examiner)

“Some of our hottest days here in Wisconsin tend to have relatively low humidity, relatively low dew points,” said Clark Evans, [a meteorological professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee](#). “So it’s hot, but it doesn’t feel as muggy or as oppressive. Whereas this event is both hot with temperatures over 100 degrees ... but it’s also very humid with dew point temperatures in the 70s, and humidity values in the 70-80% range as well.”

That’s a potent combination, he added.

“[It] can create a lot of stress on one’s body,” he said. “It becomes much more difficult to cool off when you get hot.”

It’s yet another symptom of the worsening climate crisis — and one that’s likely to be felt most acutely in northern climates, where residents are unaccustomed to the type of scorching heat that’s become the norm in southern communities, according to Jeff Goodell, an

environmental journalist and author of “The Heat Will Kill You First.”

“There’s a strong case to be made that people who live in northern cities are more at risk from these freakish and increasingly hot weather patterns that are going to be emerging in the future,” Goodell said in [an interview](#) with Wisconsin Public Radio. “Wisconsin is not known, of course, as a place where you’ve experienced a lot of extreme heat waves ... But it is now, in this new climate, a place where I would not be surprised to see temperatures far beyond what you’re used to at some point in the not-so-distant future.”



Meanwhile, in the present.

(Photo by Getty Images)

In general, states have done little to prepare for that reality. That’s particularly true of Ohio, where lawmakers accepted more than \$60 million in bribes in exchange for a \$1.3 billion bailout law that gutted efficiency and renewable standards for utility companies. The architects of the scheme have since been [sentenced to prison](#), and most of the bailout payments have been repealed — but the law, for whatever reason, is still standing. And because of that, Ohio’s utilities are among the least efficient in the country, [the Ohio Capital Journal reported](#).

The performance tanked directly after the passage of the law, according to a triennial scorecard compiled by the American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy. In 2018, a year before lawmakers approved the bailout, Duke Ohio ranked 18th in the nation for efficiency programs, followed by AEP Ohio at 21st and Edison Ohio at 34th. By 2021, a year after the law took effect, [those rankings had plummeted](#), leaving Duke and AEP tied at 49th and Edison Ohio in last place at 53.

This is, obviously, no coincidence. The law was designed to funnel hundreds of millions of ratepayer dollars to prop up two aging coal plants precisely as other states move toward renewable energy sources, while also ensuring that those plants were no longer bound to efficiency standards that incentivized greener technologies. Most of those standards were built into customers' bills, offering "shared savings" once utilities met goals set by regulators. It was an imperfect system, experts said — but it was, at least, a system.



A system!

(Photo by Getty Images)

“I think there were some legitimate concerns that legislators raised about the value of efficiency and whether the programs were well-run,” said Rob Kelter, a senior attorney with the Environmental Law and Policy Center. “But the programs were always pretty good, and they delivered good value to customers. Were we too generous with the incentives for utilities? Yeah. A little bit.”

To be fair, the utilities have kept some efficiency programs, including discounts for customers who restrict electricity usage to off-peak times. But those initiatives don’t make up for the standards that were wiped in exchange for bribes, said Mike Specian, lead author of the efficiency scorecard.

“The cancellation of utilities’ efficiency programs had an adverse impact on nearly every other aspect of utility performance that we evaluated, including for low-income customers,” he said.

AEP and Duke didn’t respond to requests for comment. A spokeswoman for Edison Ohio’s parent company said she could not comment “on the [efficiency] report itself” but said the company has “numerous efficiency programs” for customers, including rebates for energy-efficient appliances and a commercial lighting program.

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State of Our Democracy

The Texas Senate on Tuesday began the impeachment trial of Attorney General Ken Paxton, a [conservative firebrand](#) best known for suing the federal government who stands accused of [bribery, dereliction of duty and breach of public trust](#). Attorneys for Paxton began the proceedings by challenging the [16 articles of impeachment](#) against him, both individually and as a whole. Senators overwhelmingly rejected each motion, [the Texas Tribune reported](#).



Off to do some impeaching!

(Photo by Bob Daemrich for The Texas Tribune)

After Paxton pleaded not guilty to each article, House impeachment managers began their opening statements, detailing a pattern of “deceit” and a roster of alleged crimes carried out by the attorney general to benefit his friend and donor, real estate investor Nate Paul. His actions, they said, essentially “turned the keys” of the attorney general’s office [over to Paul](#), who returned the favor by helping Paxton hide an [alleged extramarital affair](#), among other things.

Paxton will not have [to testify](#), and it’s not clear whether he’ll even attend most of the proceedings. He appeared on Tuesday morning to enter his plea but skipped out after lunch, prompting outcry from impeachment prosecutors, who said his attendance should be compulsory. But Paxton’s attorney disagreed, saying the rules required his presence only at the beginning of the trial. Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, the presiding officer, agreed, effectively freeing Paxton from having to sit there and think about what he’s (allegedly) done.

Paxton can be convicted only by a two-thirds vote, which would require at least nine Republicans to join with the Senate’s 12 Democrats. (Paxton’s wife, state Sen. Angela Paxton, is disqualified from voting but permitted to attend the trial.) He would be the [first attorney general](#) impeached in

Texas and [only the third official](#) removed from office in state history.

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One Last Thing

A Nebraska man was pulled over by police for driving his Ford Crown Victoria with his pet bull, Howdy Doody, [riding shotgun](#). Officers let the man off with a warning, telling him to turn around and take Howdy Doody home.

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