

— News From The States —

EVENING WRAP



By [Kate Queram](#)

Last month, when we were on vacation in Pennsylvania, my husband took it upon himself to spot — and then squash — a handful of [invasive spotted lanternflies](#). I did not, honestly, pay much attention to this (“That’s nice, honey”), beyond a fleeting thought of sympathy for the squashed bugs. Invasive and destructive, yes, but also just trying to have a nice time in an amusement park parking lot, you know?

But it turns out he was right — experts do, in fact, [encourage you to squish](#) this particular insect. Still, I think I was kind of right, too. In the end, eliminating a handful of these bugs isn’t going to [stop them from spreading](#), contagion-like, across the country. We do what we can to feel in control, but nature always has the last word.



The Big Takeaway

It also, occasionally, has a cruel sense of irony, as the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe knows all too well. Members of the tribe live in century-old adobe homes in what’s now known as Death Valley National Park, where Hurricane Hilary dumped 2.2 inches of rainfall in a single day, nearly eclipsing the park’s [annual precipitation average](#) and shattering the area’s previous one-day record of 1.70 inches. The deluge flooded the perimeter of the tribe’s village, leaving residents trapped on an island of dry land for two days before park officials constructed an emergency road, [the Nevada Current reported](#).



*An oxymoron — desert flooding — in progress.
(Photo by Jeniffer Solis/Nevada Current)*

The torrent was part of a record-breaking year in Nevada, where rainfall more than doubled to 9.20 inches, pulling three-quarters of the state [out of drought](#) for the first time since April 2020. Theoretically, that's good news for Nevadans, depending on where they live. In the desert, where the arid soil can't absorb water fast enough to pull it from the surface, rain all but guarantees flooding. Conditions are even more precarious in west-central Nevada, where residents along the Walker River began preparing their homes for flooding after a nearby dam showed early signs of erosion following months of [record-breaking water flow](#) from melting mountain snowpack. The deluge worsened existing weaknesses that tribal officials attributed to years of lax dam maintenance by the federal government.

Those challenges are specific to Nevada, though the general problem — too much water in some places, not enough water in others — is widespread. And while it's difficult to link a single weather event to climate change, the pattern of droughts and floods in the Southwest reflects long-term predictions from climate scientists. So far, those events have inflicted the worst and longest-lasting damage on rural areas and tribal communities with the fewest resources.

Most have been unable to access federal disaster relief funds, thanks to a formula that awards funding based on the monetary damage incurred by the state rather than the municipality.

“The state wasn’t able to meet their threshold in submitting for the federal emergency declaration this year,” said Josie Burnett, the state tribal liaison for the Nevada Division of Emergency Management. “It kind of left counties, like Lyon County and the Walker River Paiute Tribe, on their own to figure out how they’re going to get those funds to work on those repairs, since the state didn’t meet that threshold. We weren’t able to, you know, provide that funding to them.”



Hog farms in North Carolina.

(File photo via NC Newsline)

Environmental regulations would be far less complicated in North Carolina under a bill awaiting a signature — or, more likely, a veto — from Gov. Roy Cooper. [The legislation](#) was

introduced in April as a benign change to animal shelter regulations but morphed over time into a behemoth package of environmental rollbacks and favors to pipeline companies, large-scale agriculture organizations and other special interest groups, [NC Newsline reported](#).

Among the bill's key provisions is a policy that would prohibit the state Department of Environmental Quality from denying hog waste lagoon or swine gas projects for civil rights reasons, curtailing one of the last ways for neighbors of enormous swine operations to seek damages. Another change would clear the way for state officials to allow poultry and livestock farms to bury dead animals with an environmental permit, leaving water resources at risk of contamination while stripping regulators of the ability to track the source of the pollution.

Other changes are more subtle, including a policy that would weaken DEQ's ability to impose safeguards on water quality for pipeline projects as long as they comply with existing state requirements. That provision, coupled with [a separate bill](#) that would allow professional land surveyors to enter private property without risking a trespassing violation, seems designed to ease the way for a proposed pipeline extension project that would stretch from the Virginia border through the middle of the state.

The bill's sponsors did not respond to requests for comment. As of Monday afternoon, Cooper had not taken action on the legislation.

Probably just a coincidence: [Yellowstone extends comment period for bison management plan after high volume of comments](#) ... [Utility shutoffs continue in New Orleans despite record heat, public objections](#) ... [Federal judge says area for oil and gas leases in Gulf of Mexico must be expanded](#) ... [Do you want a say in the future of EV charging in New Hampshire? Here's your chance.](#) ... [Loggers ask New Mexico lawmakers to help their industry to eliminate wildfire threats](#) ... [Green renewable hydrogen needed urgently, leaders say, but industry faces challenges](#) ... [How the battle for a Rhode Island oyster farm upended the public hearing process](#) ... [Washington state prisoners struggle with wildfire smoke as ventilation upgrades go unfunded](#)



State of Our Democracy

U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez (D-N.J.) on Monday rejected calls for his resignation, vowing that he'd be exonerated from a federal indictment alleging that he and his wife accepted cash bribes, gold bars and expensive cars in exchange for using his office to benefit allies and the Egyptian government, [the New Jersey Monitor reported](#). (I mean, what a sentence.)



*Allegations are allegations, methinks.
(Photo via the New Jersey Monitor)*

“The allegations leveled against me are just that — allegations,” Menendez said at a press conference in his hometown of Union City. “I recognize this will be the biggest fight yet, but as I have stated throughout this whole process, I firmly believe that when all the facts are presented, not only will I be exonerated, but I still will be New Jersey’s senior senator.”

It was the senator’s first public appearance since [the indictment dropped on Friday](#), offering a bevy of detailed allegations and ridiculous details that prompted Democrats to [call for his ouster](#). Menendez, who is up for reelection next year, brushed aside those requests Monday, proclaiming that the “court of public opinion is no substitute for our revered justice system.”

He did not take questions from reporters but did offer an explanation for the [\\$500,000 in cash](#) discovered by investigators at his home and in a safe deposit box, insisting that he’d formed a habit of keeping large wads of bills on hand after his family faced confiscation in Communist Cuba.

“Now this may seem old-fashioned, but these monies were drawn from my personal savings

accounts based on the income that I have lawfully derived over those 30 years,” he said. “I look forward to addressing other issues in trial.”

Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy addressed a different set of issues Friday, telling GOP voters that “God is real” and “fossil fuels are a requirement for human prosperity” and the real “war in this country” is between the people who agree and the ones who don’t, [the Michigan Advance reported](#).



“The country is divided into us and them, but most of them agree with us, except for the ones who don’t, but anyway, like I was saying, divisions aren’t real.”

(Photo by Robin Opsahl/Iowa Capital Dispatch)

“It’s a war between the 80% of people in this country who share the ideals of our founding, who share the idea that all men are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among these life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” Ramaswamy told a half-full room at the Mackinac Republican Leadership Conference. The other 20%, he continued, are perpetuating “genetic victimhood,” which he defined as the belief that identity is based on race,

gender or sexual orientation.

“I can tell you somebody who has now been to a majority of states, including over the course of the last couple of years, and in this campaign, that that division is artificial,” he said. “It is made up. It is a projection designed to divide and conquer the people. At least 80% of this country shares the same basic values that we do.”

Just, so many questions. Do you know that visiting a majority of states to woo right-leaning voters is not the same thing as polling a majority of Americans about their personal belief systems? Can you explain why you are discussing (and seeming to disapprove of) an “artificial division” while also dividing the country into “us” and “them?” (Are there two divisions? And if one of them is imaginary, is it ultimately just one division? *Oh my god did I solve the riddle?*) Has it occurred to you that you are, perhaps, creating brand-new divisions with your divisive rhetoric about division? And could you cite your sources, please, because I am pretty sure the only thing 80% of this country agrees on is that living in this country [is kind of actually the worst?](#)

Ramaswamy did not answer any of these questions, probably because no one in the half-full room could be bothered to ask him any of these questions and also because he was too busy churning out word salad about his own authoritarian fantasies, like abolishing the free press or eliminating 75% of the federal workforce to “unlock the U.S. economy.” He also spent some time fawning over frequent criminal defendant Donald Trump, who he said was the “greatest president of the 21st century” but should not be reelected, mostly because that would imperil his own [unrealistic presidential aspirations](#).

“I respect him for his accomplishments because I am an America First conservative ... but I am not just a Trump First conservative,” he said. “The America First agenda does not belong to one man, does not belong to Donald Trump. It does not belong to me. It belongs to you, the people of this country. I am not guided by vengeance and grievance. I am guided by my gratitude to this country.”

What does any of this mean? Nothing, probably, except maybe a weird lesson in how the word “division” loses meaning if you write it enough times. In any event, at least Ramaswamy showed up, which is more than the Michigan GOP can say for Dinesh D’Souza, a fringe conspiracy theorist/“filmmaker” who was supposed to speak at the conference but bailed after the state party [couldn’t afford his appearance fee](#). You get what you pay for, I guess. (Division!)

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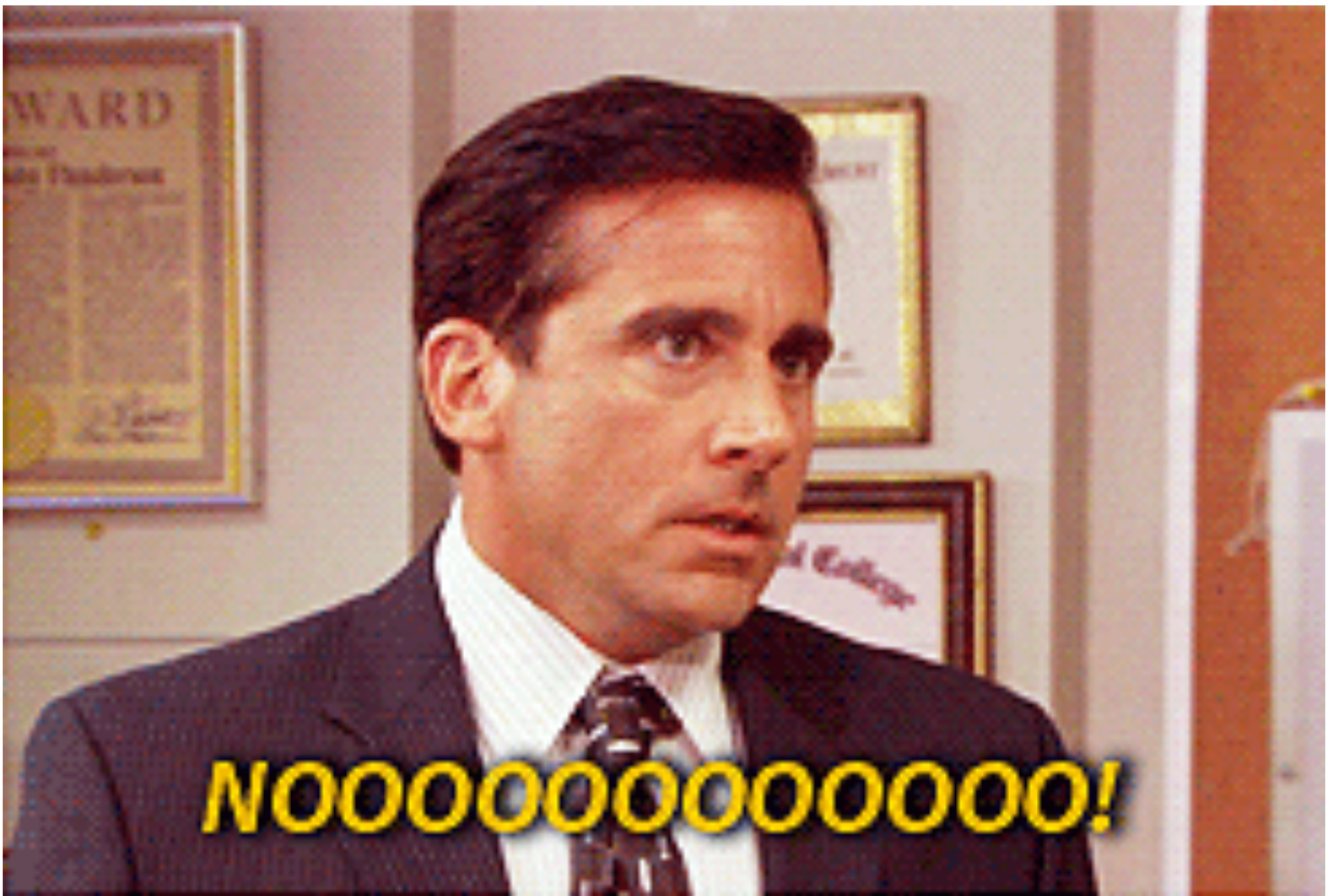
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One Last Thing

There is, apparently, an “Office” reboot [in the works](#).



STOP REBOOTING THINGS

(via Giphy)

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