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— News From The States —

EVENING WRAP



By [Kate Queram](#)

I, a thoughtful pet owner, recently purchased a suction-cup window hammock in hopes of improving life for my very awkward cat, whose favorite hobby is staring out the window. He hadn't used it yet, which I figured was more about his awkwardness than about willful avoidance — until today, when I found him seated happily on the hard cabinet directly *below* the hammock, staring dreamily outside with nary a thought for the \$20 I lovingly spent on him.

This is, incredibly, not the stupidest thing you will read in this newsletter (though it is, obviously, the least relevant). That's not a commentary on the stories themselves, which are (as always) good, but an accurate descriptor of their subject matter. Of course, you probably expect this by now. It is, after all, a newsletter about American politics.

The Big Takeaway

I have spent an inordinate amount of time trying to decide which of these stories to lead with, which is dumb because they are all equally exasperating. (In a way, then, a fitting exercise!) I decided to solve this nonproblem by going alphabetically, so we're going to kick things off in Colorado, where lawmakers continue to warn of rising crime rates even though crime rates have been decreasing since 2022, [Colorado Newsline reported](#).

Like, really decreasing. Through June, Colorado was on pace to record its lowest number of homicides since 2019, according to state data. Rates of violent crime and property crime — key aggregate metrics reported to state and federal databases — saw year-over-year declines during that same time period. More recent data from police departments in Colorado's three largest

cities (Denver, Colorado Springs and Aurora) show both of those trends continuing through July and August.



Police.

(Photo by Scott Olson/Getty Images)

The decline comes roughly three years after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, when crime rates boomed nationwide in what criminologists said was a response to widespread unprecedented societal and economic disruptions.

“We saw all these stressors that happened during COVID, especially economic ones, that are leading to other forms of health problems, such as drug abuse and alcohol abuse,” said Lisa Pasko, chair of the Department of Sociology and Criminology at the University of Denver. “Now we [have] not just a typical police response — although we do have that more now than we did before — but we see our services coming back, we see youth intervention efforts coming back. All of that was on pause.”

The news appears to have evaded members of the Colorado General Assembly.

Republican lawmakers spent most of 2022 bloviating about the state’s [“crime tsunami”](#) in hopes

of whittling Democrats' hold on state government; when that failed, they took the rhetoric directly to Democrats, who bought in enough [to support](#) legislation that authorized harsher penalties for motor vehicle thefts. [The bill](#), signed into law by Gov. Jared Polis in May, was a “good start in the right direction” as “crime continues to climb in Colorado, especially auto theft,” [according to state Sen. Bob Gardner](#), the Republican who sponsored it.

But auto thefts weren't rising in Colorado. Rates had fallen by nearly 20% in the nine months before the bill's introduction, according to state data. They continued to decline steadily throughout the first half of this year, right up to July 1, the date the law took effect.



*When you search the photo database for “car” you get a *lot* of photos of Kevin McCarthy, which may lead you to select the first actual car-related photo in service of your own sanity.*

(Photo by Getty Images)

None of which matters, probably. It's a tale as old as time, experts said — crime increases (or might increase, or appears to increase), and lawmakers scurry to address the change, usually without consulting data or considering the root cause of the jump.

“That is so common,” said Christie Donner, executive director of the Colorado Criminal Justice

Reform Coalition. “You can see that time and time again, that by the time a legislature reacts — and that’s all it is, it’s just a reaction — to what is perceived to be a spike in crime, the trend changes.”

Lawmakers in Indiana are conducting similarly important business, by which I mean they’re charging taxpayers for a lot of questionable travel expenses. From 2019 to 2022, legislators racked up — and were reimbursed for — \$335,226 in travel costs, including hotels, flights and registration fees for symposiums and policy talks across the globe. Popular destinations included conferences held by an organization with ties to Christian nationalism and a group that’s been criticized for providing a platform for lobbyists and corporations to influence policymakers, [the Indiana Capital Chronicle reported](#).



..I mean you just know they’re all flying American.

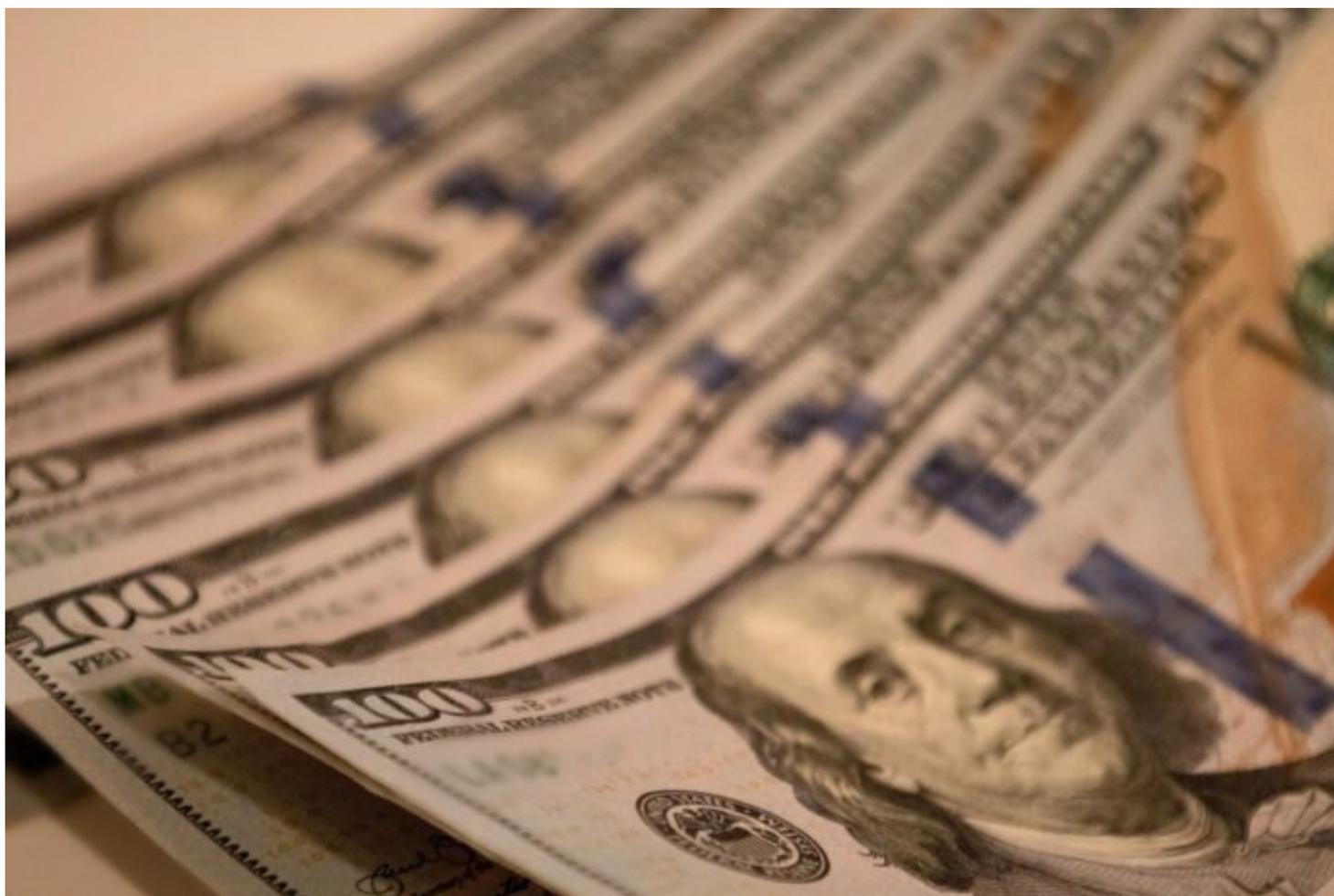
(Photo by Mario Tama/Getty Images)

Over that four-year period, at least four legislators traveled to the Wallbuilders [ProFamily Legislative Conference](#), an event that provides lawmakers with templates for “pro-family” legislation on issues like gun rights, “discipline,” “homosexual indoctrination,” “Bible electives,”

“patriotism” and parental choice, among other things. Last year’s event included a roster of controversial speakers, including Michael P. Farris, former CEO of the [Alliance Defending Freedom](#), an advocacy group best known for opposing same-sex marriage and the existence of transgender athletes.

The bigoted agenda is par for the course for Wallbuilders, a right-wing organization dedicated to “presenting America’s forgotten history and heroes, with an emphasis on the moral, religious and constitutional foundation on which America was built — a foundation which, in recent years, has been seriously attacked and undermined.”

Among the Indiana attendees was state Sen. Jeff Raatz, a Richmond Republican and the Senate’s top travel spender. Asked to explain his presence there, Raatz, who racked up \$9,267 over 11 trips, shrugged, saying he’d “only” attended the conference twice. It was, he added, a “pro-family” and “biblically based” event that centered on the “history of the United States.”



“...Sigh.” — Benjamin Franklin, probably.

(Photo by Getty Images)

This is all permissible under the legislature’s travel policies, which are so lax that I’m being

kind in referring to them as “policies.” Basically the only rule is that lawmakers must get their travel plans approved by the leadership in their chamber (Speaker Todd Huston in the House; President Pro Tem Rodric Bray in the Senate). There are other stipulations, but most are negotiable, like a rule limiting senators to a single trip per year — unless Bray feels like making an exception, which he did 24 times between 2019 and 2022.

But it seems to violate the purpose of legitimate legislative travel, said Julia Vaughn, executive director of Common Cause Indiana. Ideological conferences and meetings with lobbyists provide ample opportunity for lawmakers to be swayed, potentially at the expense of the wishes of their constituents, she added.

“I think it gets sticky when you have lobbyists attending these same meetings and taking these opportunities out of state, away from the eyes of a lot of people who are familiar with legislators, to take these opportunities to take them out to dinner, cruises, various entertainment opportunities,” she said.

Greasy palms: [Alabama Democrats clash over party direction in contentious DNC hearing](#) ... [Federal court won't delay Alabama redistricting ruling](#) ... [Ballot title submitted to exempt feminine hygiene products from Arkansas sales tax](#) ... [Challenge to Georgia political maps to proceed with state's claim Black voting power isn't diluted](#) ... [Indiana's Fifth Congressional District sees another candidate](#) ... [Iowa GOP Chair Jeff Kaufmann says concerns remain about Iowa Democrats' caucus plan](#) ... [Outgoing UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees chair considering run for state auditor as Republican](#) ... [Over 80 employees have left Oklahoma State Department of Education during Walters' tenure, records show](#) ... [Trump rally highlights Republican division in South Dakota, with booing of absent Thune, Rounds, Johnson](#) ... [U.S. Rep. Randy Weber concerned Texas projects hurt amid Freedom Caucus budget fight](#) ... [Paxton trial updates: AG didn't trust law enforcement after securities fraud indictment, whistleblower testifies](#) ... [Federal court dismisses second challenge over boundaries of Washington state legislative district](#)

Also Trending

New Jersey environmental groups are big mad at Gov. Phil Murphy, who they say is once again renegeing on a campaign promise to end the state's annual black bear hunt after state officials [last week approved](#) a plan to allow the event to continue through 2028. Murphy, a Democrat, had pledged during his 2018 gubernatorial run to end the event once he took office, [the New Jersey Monitor reported](#).



THIS BEAR IS INNOCENT

(Photo via the New Jersey Monitor)

He followed through initially, sort of, via a 2018 executive order that ended bear hunts on state property — but not on federal, county or municipal land. In 2021, he prohibited all bear hunting, but reinstated the event last year on an emergency basis after the Department of Environmental Protection [reported a 237% increase](#) in bear-related nuisance and damage reports. The regulated hunt, [Murphy said](#), would “help limit dangerous interactions between people and bears to protect public safety.”

Republican lawmakers praised Murphy for “putting science first,” but environmentalists balked at the move, saying the state had cherry-picked data to produce false population estimates to justify the hunt. Doris Lin, animal rights attorney at the Animal Protection League of New Jersey, said the group may file a legal challenge to stop the hunt from proceeding if Murphy doesn’t step in to call it off.

“We knew that their population estimate was wildly exaggerated. That’s how they convince the

public that a bear hunt is needed,” she said. “At this point, we’re hoping Murphy doesn’t allow it to go forward.”

Nature: [Going home to Lahaina won't happen anytime soon for many fire victims](#) ... [Nessel sues Gerald R. Ford International Airport Authority over PFAS contamination](#) ... [North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality fights back against ruling in favor of Wake Stone mine near Umstead State Park](#) ... [Oregon lawsuit by youth over climate inaction not likely to be helped by judicial win in Montana](#) ... [‘Resources are going to be spread thin’: NE Pennsylvania rallies after weekend storms](#) ... [State denies Summit permit; both carbon pipelines proposed in South Dakota now rejected](#) ... [Dickson County utility settles suit over sewage pollution](#) ... [Data and funds made available in Virginia to improve tree cover in the Chesapeake Bay watershed](#)



From The Newsrooms

- [Food and Drug Administration approves COVID boosters for upcoming season](#)
- [‘It just doesn’t add up’: Why the fees Wisconsin parents pay won’t cover the full cost of child care](#)
- [Iñupiaq woman focuses on Indigenous-led renewable energy efforts in New Mexico](#)
- [Meet the parents who say their rights are ignored by the ‘parental rights’ movement](#)
- [Missouri company at center of cannabis recall used hemp instead of marijuana in products](#)



One Last Thing

The Brady Bunch house [sold for \\$3.2 million](#), roughly 9% less than HGTV paid for it. Thanks for nothing, Jan.

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

info@newsfromthestates.com

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