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— News From The States —

EVENING WRAP



By [Kate Queram](#)

Guys, I don't even know. It's a little bit all over the place today. On the plus side, there is almost certainly something in here you will find interesting! On the other hand, where do I even begin?

The Big Takeaway

Since we're aimless anyway, we might as well start with a story about marijuana! Let's puff on over to Missouri, where cannabis stores have been sitting on a stash of 63,000 products that were recalled by the state after regulators could not confirm that the marijuana was derived from in-state growers or that it had undergone proper testing. Vendors can't sell the goods, and they haven't been permitted to destroy them, either — until now, [the Missouri Independent reported](#).



A bud for my bud.

(Photo by Rebecca Rivas/Missouri Independent)

The stockpile of products were manufactured and sold by Delta Extractions, a Missouri-based processor that lost its business license in August after regulators alleged that the company sourced its “marijuana or converted hemp” from other states. That’s a no-go under the state’s marijuana program, which requires all marijuana products to be sourced from Missouri-based growers. The Division for Cannabis Regulation issued the full recall two weeks later, saying the affected products — everything from [vape pens to weed gummies](#) — had [not been properly cataloged](#) in a statewide tracking system and thus could not be verified as [safe for consumers](#) or compliant with regulatory requirements.

Delta appealed the recall and the license revocation, arguing that it could not be held liable for using out-of-state marijuana because it was *actually* using [out-of-state hemp](#), which was then *converted* into THC once it got to Missouri. (I believe the technical term for this legal strategy is “trying to climb out of a hole by digging a new hole.”) This was [news to vendors](#), who had definitely been advertising those products as pure, rather than synthetic, marijuana. It was also a nonstarter as a legal defense, because it’s *also* against state law to add “hemp-derived,

chemically modified ‘converted’ cannabinoids” to marijuana products. Nice try, though. (But not really.)

All of this was set to be hashed out at [a Sept. 29 administrative hearing](#), but the proceeding was delayed until [at least December](#). It’s possible the case could get resolved before then, depending on the outcome of [ongoing negotiations](#) — but if vendors don’t want to wait, they’re now able to destroy their stockpiles of recalled products, as long as they seek permission from the state, said Lisa Cox, a spokeswoman for the Department of Health and Senior Services.

“If a licensee wishes to voluntarily destroy product on hold,” she said, “they should contact the department to discuss.”



Away we gooooo

(Photo by Shaun Griswold / Source NM)

Getting high is a whole other thing in New Mexico, where more than 500 hot air balloons will take to the skies next week during the 51st annual Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta. Last

year, the event drew more than 828,000 visitors. This year, the festival overlaps with an annular solar eclipse, which could draw even larger crowds, organizers [told Source New Mexico](#).

The event is a massive undertaking that's produced by an eponymous nonprofit that's funded mostly by sponsorships and donations. The group partners with the city of Albuquerque, which allows exclusive use of the 356-acre event grounds each year in exchange for \$150,000 of park improvements annually. This year's upgrades include new bleachers and a new drainage system, a spokeswoman said.

Other logistical concerns are similarly handled via public-private partnerships. For example, the event's park-and-ride service uses buses from two school districts, with separate contracts to reimburse bus companies for fuel and drivers. State and local law enforcement provide security alongside 175 private officers hired and paid by the nonprofit. This year, there's even a public-private balloon — a cherry red, turquoise and black number created via a partnership between the University of New Mexico and Rainbow Ryders, a ride company.



It's crabs!

(Photo by Yereth Rosen/Alaska Beacon)

Definitely not high at all: Snow crab populations in the Bering Sea, which are in worse shape than last year even after Alaska wildlife regulators scotched the annual harvest. In some ways, that isn't surprising — [snow crab numbers](#) declined by 80% from 2018 to 2022, and recovery, if possible, was never going to be a one-year project. But overall, it's still astonishing, [the Alaska Beacon reported](#).

“We've never seen the abundance this low,” Mike Litzow, a federal fisheries biologist, said Wednesday during a presentation for the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. “We've never seen a decline as great as what we saw from 2018 to 2021. That was completely unprecedented. And we just continue to see those small animals dying out of the population without being replaced, so I think it's fair to say we're in an unprecedented situation for snow crab.”

Things are only slightly better for the Bristol Bay red king crab, which notched a 46% increase in mature females over last year. But that's an uptick from the lowest levels in at least 30 years, biologists said. And mature males were down 21% from last year, according to survey results. Those numbers follow [two consecutive years](#) of canceled harvests, which could become the norm if crabs continue to die off before reaching maturity, known as “poor recruitment” in fishery lingo.

“The big picture for Bristol Bay red king crab is we continue to see poor recruitment year after year after year for more than a decade now,” Litzow said. “And without young crab coming into the stock, both males and females are at a historically low point, and we're going to expect that will continue until we do see a substantial recruitment event.”

Both red king crab and snow crab are marquee Alaska species, which usually command premium prices in the marketplace. Last year's canceled harvests cost the state \$287.7 million, according to estimates. The scarcity could become the norm, Litzow said. Warming water temperatures are lethal for snow crabs, while booming populations of sockeye salmon may be feeding on red king crab larvae.

An eclectic mix: [Lack of oversight on transmission spending leads to higher electric bills, consumer advocate says](#) ... [Alabama Medicaid Agency: Up to 100,000 Alabamians may have lost coverage](#) ... [Topeka child's murder reignites debate on how Kansas protects children from abuse and neglect](#) ... [Domestic violence may be getting more deadly in Michigan](#) ... [Minnesota cops take millions of dollars from people without criminal convictions](#) ... [Health district, RTC offer pop-up produce stand to combat food insecurity](#) ... [Tulsa Race Massacre survivors bring reparations case to state Capitol](#)

Also Trending

Diverting public funds to private schools hurts public school students across Ohio, particularly in rural counties, according to an analysis by Policy Matters Ohio, a Cleveland-based think tank. The changes, combined with pandemic-era impacts on education and “Ohio’s legacy of inadequate, [inequitable funding](#),” have “weakened the role school plays as a foundational public institution,” [the Ohio Capital Journal reported](#).



You have desks, stop complaining.

(Photo by Getty Images)

The emphasis on private school tuition ignores the reality of Ohio’s student population, researchers said. Nearly 89% of the state’s K-12 students attend public school, compared to 8.8% who are enrolled in private school. (Roughly 3% are home-schooled.) Still, lawmakers expanded the state’s voucher program to near-universal eligibility, making state-paid subsidies available to families who make up to 450% of the [federal poverty level](#), or \$135,000 for a family

of four.

The plan, adopted as part of the state's two-year budget, also ushered in the next phase of the Fair School Funding plan, a six-year effort to determine the actual per-student cost of public education. Broadly, the program aims to fund schools individually based on their specific needs, which is theoretically a good idea, researchers said – if lawmakers actually fund it, that is.

“When fully implemented, the six-year FSFP will correct the over-reliance on local property taxes, eliminate funding caps on districts, and base funding on per-pupil cost estimates that more accurately reflect what it takes to educate a diverse student population,” the report stated.

But legislators have “only incrementally moved funding through the formula,” it continued. “If legislators follow through on their promise to fully realize the FSFP by 2026, they will be helping every public school in the state to be equitably funded, and helping ensure that we live in a state where every child has what they need to succeed in school and after graduation.”

Which seems unlikely, as lawmakers don't seem to be particularly interested in long-term planning. Senate President Matt Huffman said previously that he wouldn't support funding the measure for more than two years at a time, lest he saddle some future, hypothetical lawmakers with budget items they hate.

Think of the future lawmakers (not students): [Alaska program to keep school principals to triple in size](#) ... [Arkansas education officials release first annual school voucher report](#) ... [New College of Florida athletics gets admittance to NAIA; could carry 23 sports by 2027](#) ... [UMaine grad students hoping to secure higher pay, more transparency in first contract](#) ... [Mississippi approved 1,800 religious vaccine exemptions for schoolchildren as of September](#) ... [Missouri lawmakers push for study of Lincoln University funding inequity](#) ... [New Hampshire teachers report quitting over school climate, low pay](#) ... [UNC-Asheville will cover tuition, fees for families making less than \\$80K](#) ... [Tennessee Charter School board goes split decision on Hillsdale allowing school in Madison, not Maury](#) ... [Vouchers return in Texas special session — and school funding might be left out. Here's what you need to know.](#)



State of Our Democracy

The Arkansas Republican Party last month reimbursed Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders for a \$19,000 lectern purchased with a state credit card and I just have so many questions. Why was the lectern (which I would really prefer to refer to as a podium but I can't [because it's a lectern](#)) so expensive? Is it secretly made of crystal, kryptonite or cheese? (Pretty sure it's just wood, some of it [painted blue.](#)) Why didn't the state GOP just buy the thing itself? Does the state

GOP not have a credit card? *Hello?*



I would pay like maybe \$100 for a lectern. (This is not THE lectern, but it doesn't matter. I wouldn't pay more than \$75 for that one, either.)

(Photo by razihusin/Adobe Stock)

Tragically, I do not have answers for any of these (IMPORTANT) questions. Sanders [has been squirrely](#) about responding to inquiries about the purchase, and her office was accused last week of altering and withholding public documents related to the lectern. That would constitute a violation of the state's open records law, punishable with [misdemeanor and felony charges](#), depending on the severity of the action, [per the Arkansas Advocate](#).

Sanders *did* say she'd "be happy to connect" reporters with the pricey-lectern maker — a woman named Virginia Beckett, a lobbyist and consultant and founder of Beckett Events, an Arlington company that I guess makes really expensive lecterns. And she did, sort of, by providing Beckett's phone number and email address, both of which went unanswered on Thursday.

I'm hopeful that we will get answers at some point, as the purchase is now the subject of a

legislative audit. Sanders' office said it was equally confident that the audit would turn up nothing, because it did nothing wrong beyond buying a really pricey and kind of ugly lectern.

"It is absurd to suggest that the Governor's Office working in coordination with its own cabinet agencies is in any way controversial or that this represents any deviation from standard practices," said Alexa Henning, Sanders' communications director.

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One Last Thing

Crocs is making [cowboy boots](#). They cost \$120.



Anytime, big meteor. Annnnytime.

(via Giphy)

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