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— News From The States —

EVENING WRAP



By [Sean Scully](#)

Whether you took it as a holiday or not, it's Monday once again, and that means news.



The Big Takeaway

Wolfe County, Kentucky is normally a pretty quiet place, residents say. The biggest headache is an ATV park that generates some noise during the summer.

At least it was quiet until the spring, when someone began stringing new power lines to a nearby electrical substation. Then trucks started delivering huge construction containers to a property next to the substation in August.

Then a power surge rippled along the grid in the neighborhood as those containers fired up in September.

Now the site generates a grinding metallic roar, pounding into the heads of nearby residents 24 hours per day, seven days per week, [the Kentucky Lantern reports](#).

“It’s all night long. It’s all day,” longtime resident Barbara Campbell said, speaking with some of her family members and neighbors gathered on her driveway. “It has to be like brainwashing, you know, because it’s consistent. There’s no variation.”

The company that set up the containers, Houston, Texas-based company Artemis Power Tech is paying the tiny East Kentucky Power Cooperative, which runs the substation, more than \$200,000 to upgrade the facility and has contracted for up to 13 megawatts of power if needed.

That's enough to power about 5,000 homes, and it far surpasses the next largest area power customer, a state prison that uses only about 1 megawatt of power.

The company says only that the site is a "data center," but all indications are that it is a farm for generating cryptocurrency. Such facilities require masses of computers, vast amounts of power, and air conditioners churning constantly to keep the machines from overheating.

"Computers involved with cryptocurrency mining solve complicated mathematical equations that help secure online transactions of the cryptocurrencies through a digital ledger called the ['blockchain.'](#)" the Lantern writes. "In the case of the popular cryptocurrency Bitcoin, mining companies are rewarded for solving the equations with Bitcoin itself; each Bitcoin is valued at more than \$27,000 as of early October."



This little beauty produces 24/7 metallic noise and uses enough power to light 5,000 homes. What's not to love?

(Photo by Liam Niemeyer/Kentucky Lantern)

Campbell and other neighbors have complained to local officials, but the county lacks a noise ordinance or even a zoning ordinance that might have prevented the installation.

Wolfe County Judge-Executive Raymond Banks, whom Campbell has spoken with, had been at the site a few times and “didn’t see no problem with it,” Wolfe County Magistrate Billy Banks told the Lantern. Monica Sturgill, a manager with the Ashland company Hay Crypto Mining that sold the Wolfe County land to Artemis Power Tech, mostly dismissed neighbors’ complaints, saying it is just “a different sound than what you’re used to.”

“Everybody screams they want economic development, right? Everybody screams, ‘Our county has nothing, and we need something,’” Sturgill said. “When something is done properly and done correctly and done well, no matter what, there’s always somebody that’s upset with you.”

Environmental groups worry that such operations will contribute to climate change, particularly in areas like Kentucky that rely heavily on coal to generate electricity. And the constant noise can affect not just human neighbors but wildlife as well. One Wolfe County neighbor says she has been unable to find any owls in the area since the computers fired up.

Mandy DeRoche, a deputy managing attorney at the nonprofit environmental law firm Earthjustice, says she has seen many cases across the country similar to the one in Wolfe County.

“Noise is a hyper-locally regulated thing, right? That’s why a lot of places, especially in rural communities, don’t have zoning. They’re usually quiet,” DeRoche said. “A lot of our partners around the country have had to fight for protection to minimize the nuisance or eliminate the nuisance to the extent that they can.”

Southern Nevada is not known for its abundance of water, but even by normal standards the past two years have been parched. And that’s taking a toll even on an animal adapted to dry conditions: the desert tortoise. Even before the dry years, researchers saw the population drop by a third in just a decade, and they say the drought has killed even more, though pandemic disruptions have slowed the collection of data to say how many.

Now scientists are hoping to save the threatened species by releasing 51 juvenile turtles in Boulder City Conservation Easement, selected to give them the best chance at survival, [reports the Nevada Current](#). The baby tortoises had been rescued from construction sites around Las Vegas and raised in captivity until their shells were hard enough to prevent them from being easy prey for predators.

Researchers gave the babies plenty of water, which they can store internally for long periods. They’re hoping for a wet winter so the newly released animals can replenish the population next year.

“It’s supposed to be a wet winter, but we don’t know that for certain. We had an insane drought

the last two years, so every little bit helps,” said Scott Cambrin, the senior biologist for Clark County’s conservation program.



*Fly and be free, my tortoise friends.
(Photo by Jeniffer Solis/Nevada Current)*

Normally, you may think of power plants as the main bad guys in terms of generating pollution. But, in Maryland at least, you’d be wrong.

A new report finds that fossil-fuel-powered appliances in homes and businesses generate far more pollution than all of the state’s power plants combined, [Maryland Matters reports](#).

“In fact, furnaces, HVAC systems, water heaters and other equipment powered by fossil fuels emit more than three times as much health-harming nitrogen oxides as the state’s power plants, according to the study,” which was commissioned by a coalition of environmental groups, Maryland Matters reports.

Maryland has struggled to meet Clean Air Act standards in the bustling D.C.-to-Baltimore corridor, despite improvements from power plants and other industries. The study found that while other industries were reducing emissions, emissions from equipment in residential and

commercial buildings rose 3.7% between 2017 and 2023.

“The equipment we use to heat our homes has a direct impact on our health and well-being,” said Ruth Ann Norton, president and CEO of the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative. “This report demonstrates that while fossil fuel equipment such as HVACs and water heaters has been a major source of air pollution, it has been overlooked for far too long.”

More from the Beautiful Planet file: [Gulf of Maine has eighth warmest summer on record ... \(Louisiana\) State tax filing extensions available for parishes under saltwater emergency declaration ... Oregon State University gets millions to study attitudes towards offshore wind ... How a Washington agency is trying to get housing built on public land ... Idaho schools can seek rebates to buy zero-emission electric school buses ... \(New Mexico\) Tribes at odds over drilling ban around ancient Chaco Canyon ... It smells like seed collection season at the New Hampshire State Forest Nursery ... How efforts to restrict democracy in Ohio also make it harder to fight climate change ... Virginia electric coops to test long-duration batteries on Maryland island ... Colorado to source up to 10 wolves from Oregon this winter for reintroduction efforts](#)



State of Our Democracy

The top election official in South Dakota’s largest county says a new state law is making her job harder than it used to be, [the South Dakota Searchlight reports](#).

During the last session, legislators passed a law saying that voters must have lived in a county for at least 30 days before registering to vote there. The stated purpose was to prevent out-of-state people registering an address or getting a driver’s license in South Dakota to take advantage of the state’s lack of an income tax. There are plenty of businesses in the state that rent postal boxes with the explicit promise to qualify the renter as a South Dakota resident.

The problem, Minnehaha County Auditor Leah Anderson told county leaders last week, is that she doesn’t have anything like the staff needed to verify all the voter registrations that come in.

Federal law requires that the state register every driver’s license applicant to vote automatically, unless the driver actively opts out. And state law allows same-day access to driver’s licenses, without a 30-day waiting period.

And, she said, not everybody who registers at an address that isn’t obviously a normal residence is an out-of-state tax cheat. There are a number of people who are pretty much permanent travelers who wish to remain South Dakota residents – and voters.



DakotaPost, a mailbox service in Sioux Falls. If you lived here, you'd be home now. And you wouldn't have to pay income taxes.

(Photo by John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

Pennington County Auditor Cindy Mohler is reporting similar difficulties. And even if someone does have what seems to be a legitimate residential address, how do you know exactly how long they have lived there?

“It’s pretty hard for us to prove one way or the other,” she said.

Of course, all of this discussion ignores a much larger problem: the whole thing may be illegal anyway, the Searchlight reports.

Twenty years ago, South Dakota lawmakers passed a nearly identical law for nearly identical reasons. But state officials had to ask them to repeal the law just one year later.

Legal experts also say it is possible to impose a waiting period to register to vote, but under the 1972 U.S. Supreme Court case [Dunn vs. Blumstein](#), the state must have a specific “compelling interest” in doing so. Former Secretary of State Chris Nelson says he and the attorney general concluded that they couldn’t meet that standard back in 2004.



Don't impeach him – you'll just make him angry.

(Photo by Sam Owens/Pool via San Antonio Express-News)

There is an old saying in politics that if you're going to shoot at the king, you better be sure to kill him, otherwise he's going to be angry.

The same appears to be true of the attorney general. Texas Republican lawmakers tried and failed to remove state Attorney General Ken Paxton from office last month after an extensive bribery scandal.

Now Paxton has decided to retaliate by doing what attorneys general do best: filing criminal charges. He is promising to prosecute the lawmakers who led his impeachment, [the Texas Tribune reports](#).

Paxton says that impeachment managers in the House released documents containing his personal information, including addresses, which could run afoul of a new state law protecting such information.

“The impeachment managers clearly have a desire to threaten me with harm when they released this information last week,” he said in a statement. “I'm imploring their local prosecutors in each

individual district to investigate the criminal offenses that have been committed.”

House lawyer Rusty Hardin, who was part of the impeachment team, says all information on documents related to the case was readily available from other public sources. And Paxton’s own attorneys didn’t object when the documents were entered into evidence.

"This is the exact kind of bullying, uninformed vengeful act that we predicted if the attorney general was not impeached," Hardin said. "He's trying to misuse the criminal justice system to cower and punish people who sought to impeach him under the law. It's just one more outrageous, vengeful act by a man who has no business being attorney general."

More from the Politics is Fun file: [\(Indiana\) Tensions rise over deposition, judge selection in Senate hopeful John Rust’s ballot access suit](#) ... [\(Tennessee\) East Bank developer proposal hints at potential struggle to keep revenue, housing promises](#) ... [School leaders question proximity of potential Oklahoma County jail sites](#) ... [DNC gives Alabama Democrats February deadline to pass new bylaws](#) ... [MPSC report: Michigan residents see returns from energy efficiency investments](#)



From The Newsrooms

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- [Kansas political moderates create educational nonprofit to put spotlight on 2024 elections](#)
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One Last Thing

A woman returning from a trip to Africa late last month was stopped at the Minneapolis airport by U.S. Customs officials after she declared a box containing giraffe poop.

Importing exotic poop is not illegal in itself, officials say, but it requires special permits and inspections, which the woman did not have.

What, you may ask, did the woman intend to do with the poop? Why, make it into a decorative necklace, as she had done previously with moose poop(!), [the Associated Press reports](#).

“There is a real danger with bringing fecal matter into the U.S.,” Customs and Border Protection’s Chicago field Director LaFonda D. Sutton-Burke said in a statement. “If this person had entered the U.S. and had not declared these items, there is high possibility a person could have contracted a disease from this jewelry and developed serious health issues.”



*Can we leave me out of this already?
(Photo by Jenny Evans/Getty Images)*

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