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— News From The States —

EVENING WRAP



By [Kate Queram](#)

I've got environment news and I've got political dysfunction and I've got literally nothing better to write in this space, unless you would like to read my many terrible attempts at filling it with something else. (You do not.) (There was one about oil paintings that even I do not understand.) (Save yourselves!)



The Big Takeaway

In the southeastern Colorado city of Pueblo, you'll find a cutting-edge [railroad testing facility](#), the world's first and largest solar-powered steel mill, and the biggest wind-turbine factory on the planet. There's a [utility-scale battery project](#) underway, and a federal grant could transform the city into a regional "[carbon sequestration hub](#)." Pueblo is, basically, a green-energy boomtown — or it would be, if the spoils of that industry were boosting the local economy. So far, that hasn't happened, [Colorado Newline reported](#).



*Train tracks in downtown Pueblo.
(Photo by Chase Woodruff/Colorado Newswire)*

Incomes in Pueblo are roughly 30% lower than the statewide average — exactly where they have been for the past decade. Population growth is slow, and local tax revenues are mostly flat. The local economy has struggled for years, beginning in the 1980s, when deindustrialization left some 6,000 steelworkers without jobs. That pain deepened during the Great Recession, which hit particularly hard in Pueblo. In many ways, the city never really recovered from those setbacks, said state Sen. Nick Hinrichsen, a Democrat elected in the county by less than 3 points last year.

“People do feel left out and left behind here,” he said. “There’s some legitimate gripes there. We haven’t thrived in the way the communities further north along the Front Range have, economically.”

Democrats are hoping the ongoing development will change that by creating numerous well-paying jobs. Lawmakers have sought to guide that process via legislation, including [a bill](#) establishing a range of labor requirements and wage standards for renewable energy projects. Separately, the state [Office of Just Transition](#), created in 2019, is beginning to distribute state funding to workers and communities like Pueblo that have been impacted by the shift to

renewable energy. The safeguards aim to ease the process and ward against backlash, which could stymie progress that advocates believe is critical for both the state and the planet.

“The plants are closing. It’s not abstract anymore,” said Carl Smith, state legislative director for the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers and a member of the Office of Just Transition’s advisory committee. “In Colorado, I think we have an opportunity to be the gold standard for the rest of the nation. But if we don’t get it right, there’s definitely a potential for a serious backlash for future green jobs.”



Wisconsin state Sen. Eric Wimberger is ready to relieve you.

(Photo by Henry Redman/Wisconsin Examiner)

Wisconsin Republicans ignored backlash from Democrats and environmental groups to advance an amended version of a bill addressing pollution from PFAS chemicals that limits the authority of state officials to test water or force landowners to pay for remediation efforts, [the Wisconsin Examiner reported](#).

Some of those provisions had been included in the original bill, which debuted in May as a blueprint for distributing a \$125 million trust fund for clean-up efforts. Under [the legislation](#), most

of that money would be allocated via grant programs designed to help municipalities and private well- and landowners test their water supplies for PFAS. As amended, the bill would expand that program to a host of entities *responsible* for PFAS contamination, including fire departments that used contaminated foam, solid waste disposal facilities that accepted the chemicals, and businesses that spread contaminated biosolids on their land.

It would also require the Department of Natural Resources to get permission from landowners before testing their property for PFAS. The agency would also be barred from taking action against landowners for contamination if they grant permission for the state to remediate the property – and to pay for it.



You test it, you pay for it.

(Photo by John M Lund Photography Inc/Getty Images)

Democrats and environmental groups said the bill restricted the DNR's authority to do much of anything that could actually address the problem, but Republicans defended the measure as a compromise that aimed to work with businesses and landowners rather than

antagonize them into compliance. Anyone who objects, according to state Sen. Eric Wimberger, probably has a serious “compulsion for power.”

“I kind of get chafed at the groups that think that this is some sort of abrogation of DNR authority, because it’s not,” Wimberger, a Republican and the bill’s co-sponsor, said during Wednesday’s hearing. “That person who owns a farm or a piece of land is still going to be subject to remediation orders if they don’t want to allow the DNR to do the things that need to get done. So the task is completed, the goal is accomplished. ... Because the goal is not to punish people. The goal is to solve the problem.”

The bill heads next to the full Senate and then, if it passes, to the Assembly. But it’s likely a nonstarter with Democratic Gov. Tony Evers, whose spokesman described the bill as devoid of “real, meaningful solutions” to the state’s water quality issues.

But can I interest you in a sarcastic comment?: [Billions of dollars to clean up abandoned oil and gas wells will only make a dent ... \(Alaska\) Yukon River salmon runs remain low, but chum improvements allow for some fishing ... State lawmakers angling to wade into question of property rights along Georgia’s waterways ... Indiana task force debates floodplain mapping — and how it’s affecting Hoosier property owners ... \(Kansas\) Federal officials step back from water request at Quivira wildlife refuge ... \(Kentucky\) Wolfe judge-exec says noise barrier planned for suspected crypto ‘mine’ ... What happens when America’s flood insurance market goes underwater? ... Electrified parking spaces at New Hampshire truck stop will reduce idling, air pollution ... While 3,100 hurricane survivors lack permanent homes, ReBuild NC employees earn big salaries ... ZIP code discrimination, pollution top concerns at Pennsylvania meeting on environmental justice policy ... Vermont Yankee decommissioning continues at full speed, but no plan for spent fuel](#)



State of Our Democracy

Months of division and fighting within the Idaho Republican Party are continuing to play out in public this week, as county-level officials laid blame on state-level officials and state-level officials pretended everything was fine. It is, basically, the Idaho version of Congress, and frankly I expect better from a state with [so many potatoes](#).

It’s statewide drama, but the specifics depend mostly on a Republican’s geographical location, [the Idaho Capital Sun reported](#). On the eastern side of Idaho, it’s a court battle to keep the party’s chairwoman from holding an election to fill county leadership positions. On the western side, it’s allegations of bullying and concerns over the state party’s general direction that

prompted six officials to [resign en masse last Thursday](#) from the Ada County Republican Central Committee. (And if you're the state party, everything is fine! Nothing to see here! We are super strong and we all really like each other and please stop asking us for comments!)



Literally, the elephant in the room.

(Photo by Otto Kitsinger/for the Idaho Capital Sun)

Let's start with the court case, which was [filed in September](#) by the Bingham County GOP after Dorothy Moon, the state party chairwoman, announced plans to hold a special election to select new members for the county's executive committee after determining that its own election process was invalid. A district judge on Tuesday sided with the county, barring Moon from proceeding until a separate appeal makes its way through the Idaho Republican Party process.

In his ruling, Seventh District Judge Darren B. Simpson noted that the county party had reason to distrust Moon, who continued to move forward with her plan even after learning of the appeal filed with the Idaho GOP.

“Her declaration to hold the September 18 special meeting, despite her actual and constructive knowledge of the appeal, rebuts her later-stated intention to avoid any action until the Executive

Committee processed the appeal,” he wrote. “The prior course of conduct by Chairwoman Moon underscores the committee’s mistrust.”

The opinion came four days after the mass resignation in Ada County, where six members of the GOP central committee left their posts due to the “current political climate and direction” of the state party, which they said made it “impossible to lead in Ada County effectively.” The group offered five “core reasons” for their departures, including [a new “purity test” rule](#) that requires voters who flip their political affiliation to wait two years before participating in a GOP primary contest. Also on the list: Assessment of party dues; the manner by which the state party withholds its support/censures candidates, and what the group described as bullying tactics by party leaders.

“The energy of the party is more about infighting than collaboration – more about beating each other than beating Democrats,” the former committee officers wrote in their [letter of resignation](#). “We can no longer support this system. We hope that when the State GOP’s intentions and tactics are fully brought to light, the ship can be ‘righted’ to include all Republicans and to return power to the voters and the counties.”

Moon and the state party pushed back on those allegations Monday in a detailed statement that defended the two-year rule (“crossover voting is a real problem”), flipped the bullying allegations back on the bullying county officials (“the only ‘bullying’ is coming from those who take to the pages of the mainstream media to attack fellow Republicans”) and dismissed reports of disharmony within its own ranks. Our ship is fine! Please stop rocking it!

“These accusations from the former officers are little more than projection and sour grapes from an old guard that is angry about losing their own power,” the statement said. “The Idaho Republican Party will continue fighting for faith, family, and freedom, and representing everyone who stands for Idaho values.”

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One Last Thing

A couple on a train ride in Colorado [captured footage](#) of a large hairy manlike creature they're pretty sure was Bigfoot — but Bigfoot experts are not convinced. For starters, the creature's gait is "not typical," according to Bill Hoffman, who was identified [by the Denver Gazette](#) as an expert (which is good enough for me, because we're talking about Bigfoot here.) Also atypical, according to Hoffman: The creature's "ability to turn its head without turning the shoulder in the same direction as well."

"Unless the photographer captured a hitherto unknown variant in the Bigfoot clan — and there are a few — I would have to discount this as genuine," he continued.

I have so many questions and yet am so unmotivated to dig for any answers.

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