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— News From The States —

EVENING WRAP



By [Kate Queram](#)

A fun perk about my job is that I can now recite from memory basic facts about gender-affirming care. Did you know that most puberty blockers and hormone treatments [are reversible](#)? Did you know that very few transgender kids [choose to reverse them](#)? Did you know that gender-affirming surgery is [rare among minors](#)? Did you know that obtaining any of those treatments is part of [a broader process](#) that typically involves counseling and [a child's family](#)? Did you know that this information is readily available online, even if you did not previously know it?

If so, congrats! You're officially more knowledgeable than the lawmakers pushing restrictions on other people's medical care. Those lawmakers don't care, of course, but I'm still proud of you.



The Big Takeaway

A federal judge last week [declined to pause an Oklahoma law](#) banning gender-affirming care for minors, clearing the state to begin withholding hormone treatments and puberty blockers from transgender kids. The physical effects of discontinuing treatment will vary by patient, providers said. But it will be universally devastating for [trans kids' mental health](#).

"Some of these children are going to kill themselves because of this," Mark Fergeson, a nurse practitioner and owner of a health and wellness clinic, [told the Oklahoma Voice](#).



But at least we made the base happy.

(Photo by Getty Images)

[The law](#), signed by Gov. Kevin Stitt in May, prohibits all forms of gender-affirming care for minors, including puberty blockers, hormone therapy and surgery (a rarity among patients under 18, but still a popular talking point for the “small government” crowd). Doctors who violate the law by continuing to treat their patients with appropriate medical care are subject to harsh penalties, from losing their licenses to felony charges.

The bill granted a six-month grace period for transgender children who were already receiving care to wean off their treatments. But many of those patients continued their courses of care after the state attorney general [agreed to pause enforcement](#) of the policy amid a legal challenge from the American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma. Last week’s ruling changes that, clearing the way for the law to take effect on Nov. 1 — exactly six months after Stitt signed it.

The law is one of [at least 19](#) similar policies approved by Republicans this year, most of whom

insisted the restrictions were necessary to protect children from making reckless and permanent decisions about their own gender identities. None of that is true, of course — puberty blockers and hormone treatments are reversible, and denying them to trans and nonbinary kids drastically increases their [risk of suicide](#) — but lawmakers don't care. A majority of Americans [do not understand](#) what it means to be trans, and Republicans are all too happy to use that ignorance to their advantage.



OH MY GOD JUST LET PEOPLE EXIST

(Photo by Getty Images)

And so the bigotry marches on in red states across the country. On Thursday, Wisconsin Republicans advanced a trio of bills that would bar gender-affirming care for minors and prohibit transgender girls and women from joining athletic teams that align with their gender identity, [the Wisconsin Examiner reported](#). All three cleared the Assembly with zero Democratic votes on the 25th anniversary of [the death of Matthew Shepard](#), an openly gay 21-year-old college student who was beaten, tortured, tied to a fence and left to die.

“It was a murder that was fueled by hate and by fear. He was 21 when he died and he should have been 46 today,” Minority Leader Greta Neubauer said during floor debate. “Twenty-five

years after his death, to the day, we are here on the floor to debate legislation based on the same sentiments: hate and fear.”

[The proposed gender-affirming care ban](#) is similar to Oklahoma’s law, minus the felony charges for doctors who violate the policy by treating their patients. (Those providers could still lose their licenses.) Most of the state’s major medical groups [have opposed the bill](#), including the Wisconsin Medical Society, the Medical College of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Academy of Family Physicians.

Democrats sided with the doctors, describing the bills as hateful and harmful to children who were more at risk for depression and bullying *before* lawmakers across the country decided to target them for no reason. Last year, a third of LGBTQ+ kids said their mental health had [been negatively impacted](#) by the onslaught of discriminatory bills and policies. Gender-affirming care, by contrast, [has been shown](#) to improve mental health among trans kids.



What a joy to be in debt from medical school only to watch uneducated lawmakers dictate medical protocol.

(Photo by Getty Images)

Presented with those facts, Republicans vowed to research the issue and LOL JK, they continued to insist they were protecting kids “from the social contagion” based on the “science of brain development.” That’s way better than the *Democrats*, who are so busy spouting “empty rhetoric” and throwing around words like “hateful” that they never get around to explaining why they believe “that mutilating kids who don’t even know what day it is or their colors can decide to permanently change themselves,” according to Assembly Speaker Robin Vos. Were it not so pathetic and — yes — hateful, you’d almost have to laugh.

The bills are likely to pass the Republican-supermajority legislature before meeting their demise at the hands of Democratic Gov. Tony Evers, who vowed to veto all three “scary” and “downright dangerous” proposals.

“I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again,” Evers said [in a statement](#). “Not one of these bills will become law in Wisconsin as long as I am governor.”

If only they could gerrymander statewide races, too: [Arkansas librarians meet for annual conference amid censorship pressures](#) ... [Activists turn their eyes toward book bans in St. Tammany school libraries](#) ... [Residents file lawsuit challenging Montana’s attempt to narrowly define sex](#) ... [Nebraska’s Brandon Teena mural honors transgender history, community](#) ... [Families, doctors file federal suit over North Carolina’s transgender care ban](#) ... [More than 100 people submit testimony against bathroom ban for Ohio colleges and K-12 schools](#) ... [Drag queens grateful after Ohio Supreme Court removes performance ban from ballot](#)



State of Our Democracy

Arkansas lawmakers this week approved a request for a nonpartisan investigation into Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders’ \$19,000 lectern and other expenditures by her office that were recently shielded under a new records law, [the Arkansas Advocate reported](#).

As approved, the probe, conducted by the independent Arkansas Legislative Audit, will dig into “significant expenditures involving the governor’s office” that were exempted [under the law](#), which shields records and communication related to security matters for the governor and other elected officials. The audit is expected to begin immediately, lawmakers said.



*State Sen. Jimmy Hickey, not using a lectern.
(Photo by Tess Vrbin/Arkansas Advocate)*

I am not sure how a person could forget about the \$19,000 lectern, but in case you have, here's a recap. First, no, no one knows why it cost \$19,000 — it's just a regular old wooden (not golden and/or diamond) lectern, parts of which are [painted blue](#). We first learned of its existence in September, when the state GOP reimbursed Sanders for the purchase, which was placed on a state credit card. Lawmakers began contemplating an audit after Sanders [dodged questions](#) about the purchase; those thoughts became more serious after [her office was accused](#) of altering and withholding public documents related to the lectern. Those actions would violate the state's open records law, punishable with [misdemeanor](#) and [felony charges](#), depending on the severity of the action.

The governor's office previously denied the allegations, saying it was "absurd to suggest" they'd done anything shady, or even anything that might constitute a "deviation from standard practices." It is a "manufactured controversy," according to Sanders and her spokeswoman, who said they "welcome" the audit.

Lawmakers, meanwhile, were just excited to have accomplished something.

“This is what the Legislature’s about,” said Republican state Sen. Jimmy Hickey, who requested the audit. “We served the public well today.”

Don’t worry, there’s always tomorrow: [Georgia’s controversial 2021 voting law overhaul survives preliminary legal challenge](#) ... [Largest authority line fine in Maryland history levied against 1776 PAC for texts in 2022 school board race](#) ... [Brothers arrested outside Maryland State House take case to Supreme Court](#) ... [Minnesota redistricting efforts earn a mere passing grade, calls for more representation](#) ... [Former sheriff tries to enlist Minnesota law enforcement in his far-right crusade](#) ... [Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves, needing to shore up right-wing turnout, attends closed-door meeting with concerned conservatives](#) ... [Virginia Supreme Court reinstates ban on slots-like skill games](#) ... [Wisconsin Assembly condemns Hamas attack on Israel](#) ... [We don’t talk about Leonard: The man behind the right’s Supreme Court supermajority](#)



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One Last Thing

Grazer, a brown bear who is adept at catching salmon, won [this year’s Fat Bear Contest](#), besting runner-up Chunk by more than 80,000 votes. According to her bio, Grazer is known to attack larger males to protect her cubs; so far, she’s raised two litters.

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