

News From The States

EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

I am very triggered by leafblowers — they are [so loud](#) and [bad for the environment](#) and did you know that you actually [don't have to move leaves](#)? — so I am sad to report that there are at least three of them blaring at full blast right now on my street. I am *very on edge* and also probably *kind of deaf now* and *distracted*. I am surviving, not thriving. And yet I am still more functional and better at my job than Congress. So, you know. At least I have that going for me.



The Big Takeaway

Let's start with the big news out of D.C., where President Joe Biden on Thursday signed a stopgap funding measure hours ahead of an impending government shutdown. The bill, approved by bipartisan coalitions in both the House and Senate, is an anodyne placeholder that maintains current spending levels for high-priority agencies through Jan. 19, with a Feb. 2 deadline for the rest. It does not include aid for Ukraine or Israel, or anything else that might be considered even slightly controversial, [our D.C. bureau reported](#).



*Thrilled to not be the guy in charge of the House!
(Official White House photo by Oliver Contreras)*

Well, unless you're a House Republican who prefers to use spending bills as leverage for your MAGA fever dreams, in which case the absence of controversy is, itself, a controversy. For those lawmakers, House Speaker Mike Johnson's decision to team with Democrats on a spending bill without demanding draconian funding cuts or ultraconservative policy conditions was an infuriating betrayal. The far-right Freedom Caucus on Tuesday pilloried the bill and admonished House Republicans for "negotiating against ourselves" by promising to "roll over today" and "fight tomorrow."

"[The bill] contains no spending reductions, no border security, and not a single meaningful win for the American people," the caucus [said in a statement](#).

What this means is that Congress will reconvene in January to hash all of this out for the umpteenth time, a process that seems more likely to end in chaos than a permanent spending agreement. Far-right lawmakers have made it clear that they will not support a funding proposal without wringing policy concessions from the Biden administration, and the administration has made it clear that it expects those lawmakers to come to terms with the spending agreement [hashed out last spring](#) by then-House Speaker Kevin McCarthy. That

friction leaves Johnson with the same choices that [stymied his ousted predecessor](#): Shut down the government over demands that Biden won't entertain, or imperil his speakership by striking a deal with Democrats.

The Freedom Caucus said Tuesday it "remained committed" to working with Johnson, mostly because he hasn't been speaker long enough to throw his weight around in service of the MAGA faithful. (Or, as Johnson explained it [to CNN](#), "I can't turn an aircraft carrier overnight.") But there are limits to their patience. Republicans are already hashing out tactics to strike back at funding deals they disagree with, including the same procedural delays that paralyzed the House [in June](#).



*Meanwhile, in Nebraska.
(Photo by Zach Wendling/Nebraska Examiner)*

The inanity is not limited to Congress — it is also in Nebraska, where Gov. Jim Pillen may back a 2024 bill to legally define “sex” at the request of the Department of Administrative Services. It’s not clear how defining “male” and “female” in state law jibes with the agency’s stated mission of “grow[ing] opportunity through more effective, more efficient and more customer-focused state government,” but whatever. A statutory definition of sex would supplement Pillen’s so-called [“Women’s Bill of Rights,”](#) and that is enough for his office and

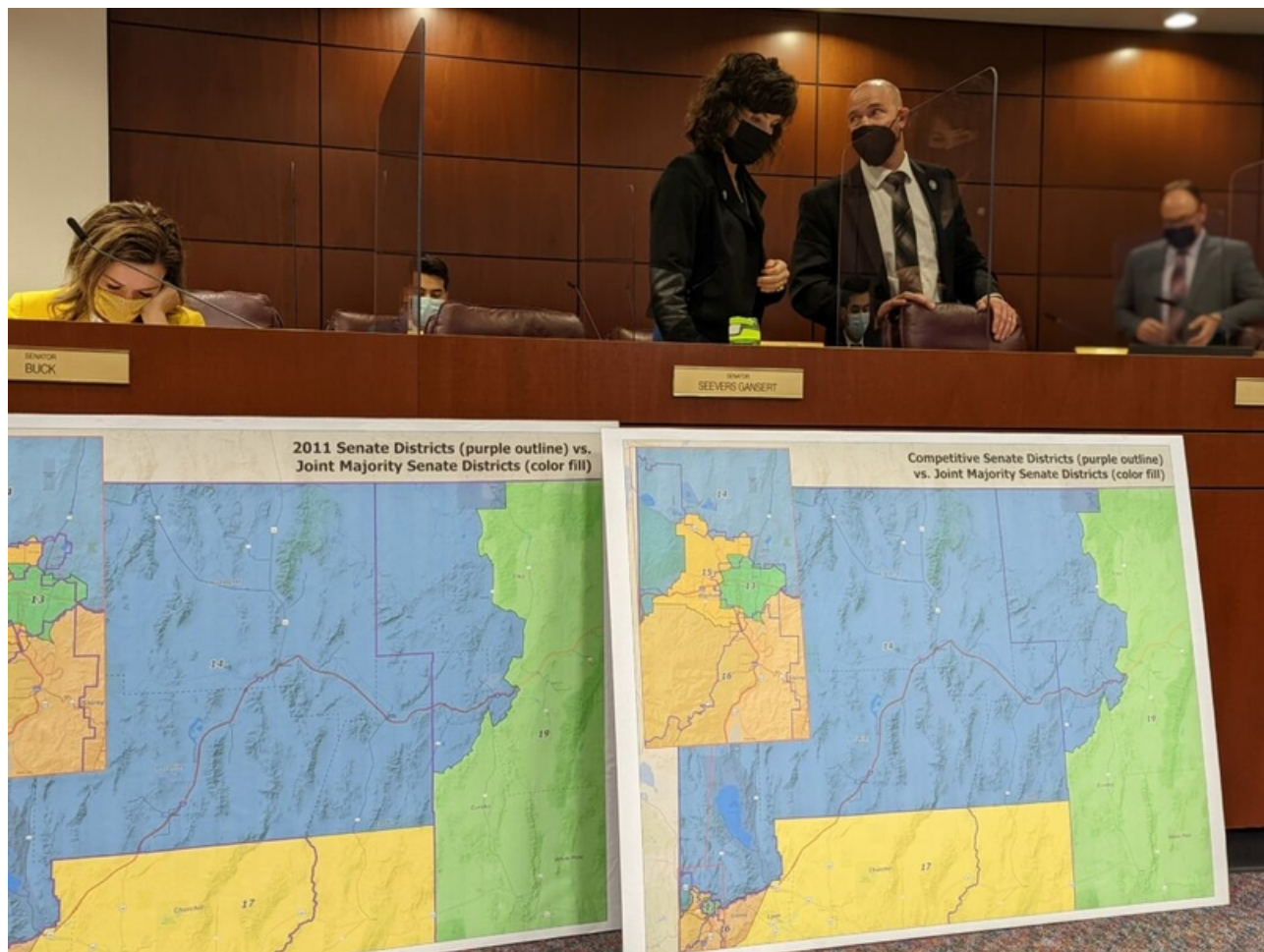
for the adviser who drafted the proposal, [the Nebraska Examiner reported](#).

“The DAS bill proposal to ensure Nebraska law reflects a commonsense definition of men and women is a well-crafted suggestion by the agency,” Laura Strimple, Pillen’s communication director, said in a statement. It “remains under ongoing consideration,” she added.

[The legislative proposal](#), dated Sept. 1, calls for a bill defining “male” and “female” in accordance with an August executive order that restricted both terms to correlate with a person’s reproductive organs rather than their gender identity. The legislation would “complement” that policy, the proposal said, but it would also be a “response to activists’ attempts to redefine terminology.” For a template, the agency suggested [an editorial](#) published by the ultraconservative [Heritage Foundation](#), which instructs state lawmakers to define sex to stymie “gender ideology’s growing influence on our laws and institutions.” (DAS officials, including the proposal’s author, could not be reached for comment.)

State Sen. Megan Hunt, an Omaha Democrat whose son is transgender, [blasted the proposal](#) as discriminatory and lambasted the department for prioritizing it in the upcoming legislative session. Scrutinizing people’s genitalia has little to do with the agency’s responsibilities, which mostly involve oversight of boring departments like the Building Division and the accounting team, she said.

“Not workforce. Not growing our economy. Not reducing government waste,” Hunt said. “Just crotch watch.”



*No crotch watch, just maps.
(Photo by April Corbin Girnus/Nevada Current)*

I will leave you with some (potentially) good news out of Nevada, where advocates announced plans to gather petition signatures for two constitutional amendments that would create an independent redistricting commission to redraw the state’s political maps, effectively (hopefully?) ending partisan gerrymandering. Each initiative would have to be approved by voters twice — once in 2024, if it makes the ballot, and then again in 2026 — to take effect, [the Nevada Current reported](#).

The proposals are nearly identical, save for one key difference: The date by which the redistricting commission would have to draw its first set of maps. One version sets that deadline in 2031, after the next census. The other pushes it up to 2027, which would put new maps in place before the 2028 election cycle, then redraw them four years later.

Advocates with the Fair Maps Nevada PAC said the amendment would ensure fair maps for voters who have been disenfranchised by politically gerrymandered districts. Currently, Nevada’s congressional boundaries [heavily favor Democrats](#),

according to a national [redistricting report card](#) released last month. (Nevada got an F. If redistricting was high school, Nevada would not be walking at graduation.) We're not sure yet how the 2021 maps will impact the state legislature, where Democrats hold a supermajority in the Assembly but just a regular majority in the Senate. Gov. Joe Lombardo, a Republican, has vowed to keep it that way by working to [elect more Republicans](#).

Advocacy groups filed an identical proposal for the 2020 ballot but did not gather enough signatures, thanks to court challenges and then COVID-19. (Nobody wants to sign your petition in a global pandemic.) Things will likely go better this time, in part because Nevadans are now fairly accustomed to signing petitions. Groups gathered enough signatures to put before voters an amendment to open the state's political primaries, which garnered 53% of the vote in 2022 and will return for final approval next year.

"We might have the magical combo to do this," said Sondra Cosgrove, head of the Fair Maps Nevada PAC.

Abracadabra: [Alaska minimum wage set to increase in new year; additional hikes proposed in ballot initiative ... Idaho secretary of state says he can't enforce new GOP voter affiliation deadline ... Group appeals ruling by Michigan judge keeping Trump on the 2024 ballot ... Conservative groups lick wounds after Minnesota school board election loss, vow to continue fighting ... U.S. Rep. Michael Guest \(R-Miss.\) introduces measure to expel New York Congressman Santos from House ... Second lawsuit challenges changes to Montana voter registration law ... New Mexico turnout up in 2023 local election ... Ohio House passes bill that GOP says promotes free speech in classrooms. Educators disagree ... Northeast Ohio lawmaker removed from Democratic caucus for 'abusive behavior' ... Prominent anti-LGBTQ+ activist Jared Woodfill running for Texas House](#)



Also Trending

Wisconsin Democrats on Thursday released drafts of 20 bills addressing climate change, tackling everything from green jobs training to support for developing biodigesters that can turn waste to energy. Assembly Minority Leader Greta Neubauer said the package is designed to garner bipartisan support, but also to

lay out a comprehensive vision for how Democrats want to approach the escalating threat of the warming planet, [the Wisconsin Examiner reported](#).



*Birds don't like climate change either.
(Photo by Ethan Miller/Getty Images)*

“The climate crisis is real, and there is no time to waste in taking action,” Neubauer, a Racine Democrat, said at a press conference. “We need to build our climate resilience, invest in policies that will help grow our green economy, and support Wisconsinites as we build a better future for all of us.”

Among the bills highlighted by Assembly Democrats were proposals to help finance home solar systems, encourage farmers to plant carbon-sequestering crops, add county land conservation staff, and require bike lanes and pedestrian paths in all new road construction projects. If lawmakers can get behind ceremonial resolutions honoring booze and bacteria, said state Sen. Chris Larson, they should be able to muster support for more important bills.

“In times of divided government, like we have here in Wisconsin, it’s easy for us to focus on the low hanging fruit,” Larson said. “But, no offense to the [state cocktail](#), [state cheese](#) varietals, or even the [state microbe](#) — these items have their place to be sure — the people elected us to solve problems that are much

bigger and affect far more people far more directly.”

None of the proposals have garnered support from Republicans, who hold large majorities in both chambers of the state legislature and have been generally loath to compromise on anything. Which is whatever, according to Neubauer. The only thing Democrats can do is propose legislation they believe in and hope it lands, she said.

“As the Assembly Democrats we can do two things at all times: to try to pass policy that is going to improve people’s lives in Wisconsin, and to put forward the vision for what we know Wisconsinites need long term, even if we can’t get it passed right now,” Neubauer said. “I know that what is really needed to take on climate change is going to be a longer-term project here in the Assembly.”

Other climate projects: [Boebert challengers diverge on best use of public lands in western Colorado](#) ... [With more and heavier rain, more inland flooding in Connecticut](#) ... [Maine governor, congressional delegation want vital fishing area free of offshore wind development](#) ... [Maryland Gov. Wes Moore taps seasoned government officials for new climate posts](#) ... [After efforts rejected this summer, Zinke introduces bill to require feds to ‘fill’ Montana’s Flathead Lake](#) ... [Homes near North Carolina county landfill on bottled water after PFAS detections](#) ... [Coal company got big payback from Ohio’s HB 6](#) ... [Report: Oklahoma could lack power reliability if extreme winter weather hits](#) ... [Oregon State University drops out of plan to manage Elliott State Research Forest](#) ... [Federal court overturns Texas agency’s pollution permit for Gulf Coast natural gas export terminal](#) ... [Dominion to test another long duration battery, microgrid capability at Va. State University](#)



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[rules](#)



One Last Thing

OpenAI's board of directors [said Friday](#) it had ousted Sam Altman as CEO after losing “confidence in his ability to continue leading” the company, which honestly I am including here only because I need to justify the time I spent reading [a long profile of Sam Altman](#). (I, too, have lost confidence in his ability to continue leading, which is to say that I never had any to begin with.)

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