

News From The States

EVENING WRAP

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By [Greg LaRose](#)

Welcome to Tuesday. Let's see what's in the news.



The Big Takeaway

The reason modern man has been able to exist on Earth for 200,000 years is that, at some point, we figured out our chances for survival were better if we were simply decent to one another. I can't help but wonder: What finally got through the thick skull of Ardipithecus? Did Australopithecus just get bored with clubbing his best friend over the head with a tree branch and then — poof — homo sapien takes center stage?

Speaking of futility...

The policy failure in other states isn't enough to convince Oklahoma not to follow course with laws that criminalize homelessness. Lawmakers there are introducing proposals designed to take down encampments and make it illegal to panhandle or feed people who are unhoused, [Oklahoma Voice](#) reports.

Why the harsh steps now? According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, Oklahoma's unsheltered homeless population has [increased](#) 15% over a decade. It has steadily risen since 2015. Estimates show 1,317

people were living on the streets in 2022.

For the sake of comparison, the [city of New Orleans' homeless population](#) was 1,390 as of January.

Yet Republican officials in Oklahoma are behind the push to place the unhoused into the correctional system, as opposed to emphasizing housing placements or mental health treatment. Their efforts, although unsuccessful to date, could be considered creative if not so outright inhumane.

Two state Senate bills would have effectively banned homeless encampments by requiring they comply with [building](#) codes.

Shawnee city government recently passed an [ordinance](#) that limits feeding four or more homeless people without a permit in the downtown area.

Some local leaders are aware of the limits they face. For starters, it's not [against the law](#) to be homeless. And Norman Mayor Larry Heikkila acknowledges the U.S. Constitution also applies to the unhoused.

"Constituents have complained to me about panhandling, but the Supreme Court has said panhandling is freedom of speech," Heikkila said.

Proponents of criminalizing homelessness have tended to change their tunes once they realize taxpayers are still on the hook for sheltering and care of people who are forced off the streets. Perhaps there's a nonprofit solution staring them in the face.

Hello? It's Giving Tuesday, after all.



Police in Kanawha County, West Virginia, responded to a 911 call on Oct. 2 about children locked in this shed on a property in Sissonville. Records show state officials were made aware of the situation more than a month earlier.

(Rafael Barker/West Virginia Watch)

Perhaps more discouraging than a punitive approach to homelessness is the repeated failure of society to rescue its most vulnerable.

Documents show child protective services workers in West Virginia were told in August to promptly check on children living in a shed without access to running water or a toilet. However, the state health department doesn't have documentation showing that CPS workers made contact with the children before police discovered the situation more than a month later.

According to documents [West Virginia Watch](#) obtained, the referral to state welfare workers in August said, "It is believed that the children are residing in a room attached to the barn ... The family may be using the children as slaves."

Adoptive parents Donald Ray Lantz and Jeanne Kay Whitefeather were arrested

in October on felony child neglect charges after a deputy found two teens locked in a shed with [“devastating” conditions](#), including a pan on a tarp to serve as the bathroom. One sleeping bag [was rolled up](#) on the concrete floor. The parents remain in jail.

Stacy Miller, who lives nearby, said she began calling CPS in May about the family down the road. She saw the kids out in the yard — their heads down, forced to stand in a straight line, she said. She witnessed what she called forced manual labor.

Miller never heard back from CPS about her concerns. Other neighbors [said the same thing](#).

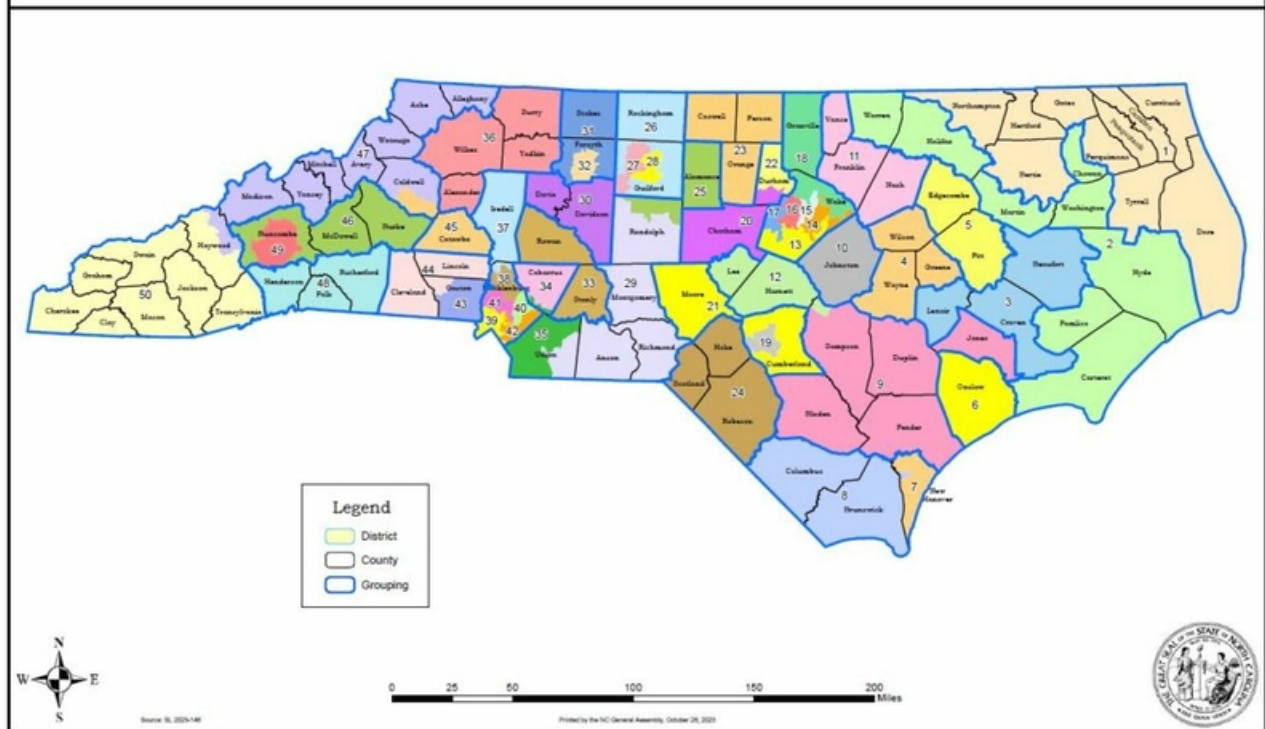
“I’m supposed to do the right thing and call. For a government entity that us taxpayers fund ... to not feel like I was listened to at all, that’s heartbreaking for me,” Miller said.

‘The least of our brethren’: [Demand for food spikes in past year as many Oregonians struggle with hunger ... Family members fill crucial role providing long-term care \(Washington State\) ... Idaho’s infant, mother death rate is rising, new report finds ... Trump moves — again — to remove Obamacare. Democrats — again — pounce \(Nevada\)](#)



State of Our Democracy

The redistricting process reminds me of giving a 4-year-old a new box of crayons. Of course the obvious difference is that the 4-year-old will eventually finish their project.



Ladies and gentlemen, I give you North Carolina, the Fruity Pebbles of politics.
(NCGA)

It's bad news in North Carolina — and pretty much anywhere people have a basic affinity for democracy. Efforts to prevent the Republican-drawn state Senate redistricting map from being used in the next election cycle suffered a setback Monday, [NC Newsline](#) reports.

A federal judge denied a request for an expedited briefing and decision in a plaintiffs' [case that alleges](#) the state Senate districts violate the Voting Rights Act.

In his four-page [order](#), U.S. District Judge James C. Dever — a conservative Republican appointed to the bench by former President George W. Bush — noted the expedited request completely ignores the heavy workload of the court — “thirteen sentencing hearings, three revocation hearings, a civil bench trial, and two pretrial conferences in criminal cases” this week alone.

So these plaintiffs have to suffer as a result of the inefficiency or inadequacy of the federal court system? Seems a bit much.

While the plaintiffs' case can proceed, the Senate district map that Democrats say gives Republicans an advantage in 2024 is unlikely to be put on hold before

the candidate filing period opens Monday.

The lawsuit claims the Senate plan as drawn configures the districts in North Carolina's northeastern counties in such a way to dilute Black voting strength.

As NC Newsline previously [reported](#), Republican legislators drew the redistricting plans in secret, without input from Democrats.

Meanwhile in Ohio, a partisan majority on its state Supreme Court chose to leave Ohio's legislative redistricting maps in place for 2024 and beyond, denying a challenge to the constitutionality of the newest versions. The [Ohio Capital Journal](#) reports it's a drastic change from previous rulings.

In a 4-3 ruling released Monday evening, right-wing justices on the court pointed to the bipartisan support of the district maps adopted in September as one reason to dismiss challenges filed by the ACLU and anti-gerrymandering groups.

"The bipartisan adoption of the September 2023 plan is a changed circumstance that makes it appropriate to relinquish our continuing jurisdiction over these cases," Chief Justice Sharon Kennedy wrote in [the majority opinion](#), along with fellow justices Patrick Fischer, Patrick DeWine and Joseph Deters.

That bipartisan support "means that it is effective for the 2024-through-2030 election cycles," the majority wrote.

All five of Ohio's previous maps were rejected by the former bipartisan court majority when Republican Maureen O'Connor was chief justice, based on arguments by anti-gerrymandering groups that the maps were unduly partisan, favoring Republicans in a way that map challengers said did not match the election trends of the last 10 years.



*Hey, those pillows aren't just going to sell themselves.
(Nicole Neri/Minnesota Reformer)*

As much as you'd like to think redistricting is the only hellscape on the horizon, let's not forget the vision MyPillow CEO Mike Lindell has of America — one where election technology is replaced with something slightly more advanced than papyrus scrolls and ink made from the soot of book burnings.

Reporter Deena Winter with the [Minnesota Reformer](#) got an up-close look when she spent two days with Lindell at MyPillow headquarters.

OK, where to begin? There's really no clear starting point when it comes to Lindell.

Any one of these topics covered in the article might interest you: the Election Crime Bureau, Jim Bakker (yes, that Jim Bakker), a poisonous plant extract and unproven COVID-19 treatment, FrankSpeech (it's not about hotdogs), Steve Bannon, MyPillow hoodies, California crust pizza.



From The Newsrooms

- [\(Florida\) Koch network's Americans for Prosperity PAC endorses Nikki Haley](#)
- [Kansas governor slams brakes on new license plate: 'I've heard you loud and clear'](#)
- [Experts say Maine is on the right track in adopting a green economy](#)
- [Governor sings Spice Girls hit to explain South Carolina's economic approach](#)
- [Minnesota celebrates first Black chief justice as swearing-in ceremony](#)



One Last Thing

The fast casual food chain Chopt is living up to its name — that's what a lawsuit from a customer points out, according to an [Associated Press](#) report.

Allison Cozzi of Greenwich, Connecticut, alleges she bought a salad at a Chopt location in Mount Kisco, New York, on April 7, 2023. While eating it, she realized “she was chewing on a portion of a human finger that had been mixed into, and made a part of, the salad.”

The lawsuit said it was the manager's fingertip, and it got into the salad through an arugula chopping accident. Hands down, that's service with a little something extra.

Don't forget to tip your wait staff, people.



All you can eat.
([Giphy](#))

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