

News From The States

EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

Do you have questions about government, politics, plausible excuses for rejecting something you specifically demanded, and/or Usher? Send them over to askkate@statesnewsroom.com, and I may answer them in an upcoming newsletter!

Government can often be a force for good, but progress rarely comes without hiccups. Federal lawmakers expanded [health care coverage](#) to millions of Americans but bungled the launch of [a corresponding website](#), leaving millions of people unable to purchase plans. State officials successfully conducted [a presidential election](#) during a global pandemic, only to have the accomplishment tarnished by [conspiracy-touting lawmakers](#).

In short: Government can do important things. It just can't do them perfectly.



The Big Takeaway

Typically, the stumbles are rooted in good intentions. Since the end of December, college students across the country have struggled to access federal financial aid forms as the U.S. Department of Education [enacts changes](#) designed, somewhat ironically, to [simplify the process](#) and expand eligibility. The glitches have affected every part of the aid process, forcing colleges to [delay submission](#)

deadlines and making it impossible for millions of students to apply for funds at all.



*An ineffective alternative.
(Photo by Getty Images)*

The updates have been particularly challenging for students with undocumented parents, who have been unable to complete [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#) forms due to an error that rejects income information from anyone without legal immigration status. In Arizona, that mistake could affect [more than 90,000](#) students, [the Arizona Mirror reported](#).

“It feels like a setback,” said Xiomara Flores, a 19-year-old and would-be Arizona State University student whose parents are undocumented. “You feel like you’re almost there to the finish line, but there’s always just that one thing that’s stopping you. And it seems to always be that one thing.”

The FAFSA system has been unable to accept income information from adults without Social Security numbers since at least January, when the Department of Education added the issue to [a growing list](#) of unresolved problems. A spokesperson for the agency said a solution is in the works but did not offer a timeline. Other issues have resulted in months of delays, including a lag in financial eligibility reporting that prompted Arizona’s public universities to [push](#)

[FAFSA submission deadlines](#) to late spring.



*This is the Arizona State University sun devil mascot, which just felt like something you should see.
(Photo via the Arizona Mirror)*

The situation leaves students like Flores at a distinct disadvantage, advocates said. Most students can complete and submit their forms ahead of time, but that’s not an option for anyone with undocumented parents. The old system provided workarounds for those issues, like allowing students to submit an application signed only by a parent with legal status, but the updates did away with those loopholes, said José Patiño, vice president of education and external affairs at Aliento, an advocacy organization focused on undocumented youth.

“That’s the frustrating part,” Patiño said. “Before, there were ways to work around to support those with mixed status families to be able to complete the FAFSA. Now, there isn’t.”

Tech upgrades are faring better in Oklahoma, where three school districts are using artificial intelligence programs to supplement traditional learning and streamline administrative tasks. Those efforts have been [sanctioned by state officials](#), who view schools as a central component of a larger plan to prepare the next generation to enter an AI-dominated workforce, [per the Oklahoma Voice](#).

“I think the key for us is, how do we teach our people, particularly our students,

to maximize the benefit of those [systems]?” said state Rep. Jeff Boatman, a Tulsa Republican and a member of the governor’s AI task force. “How do we become intelligent, efficient users of the technology? And also how do we become critical of it?”



*“Hello, I’m here to teach math.”
(Photo by Tomohiro Ohsumi/Getty Images)*

Schools are beginning to find out. At Epic Charter School, a primarily online institution with roughly 27,000 students, officials leveraged AI systems to craft individualized learning plans based on anonymized test scores and taught teachers to detect plagiarism. Tulsa Public Schools deployed an AI tutor to help students [boost reading skills](#); in Oklahoma City, two high schools are testing AI math software. The state’s largest colleges — the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University — announced plans to include AI programs in new polytechnic institutes. The technology is also applicable in other departments, said Christine Ormsbee, OSU’s vice provost.

Faculty can decide on their own whether to use it, she added. Eventually, all educators will grapple with that question.

“My responsibility is to teach you some foundational skills, and if you’re using a technology tool that allows you to complete a task I’ve given you without

accomplishing the skill development, then I've not done my job," she said. "Already we're seeing a lot of opportunities for K-12 schools to use ChatGPT and other AI tools. They're just going to have to figure out the best ways."

There is no time for lofty technology debates in Ohio — there is only time for capitalism, which would be added to the state's high school financial literacy curriculum under a bill approved last week by House lawmakers, [the Ohio Capital Journal reported](#). Supporters of the measure said it was a much-needed addition to the public education system, which currently sends students out into the American economy armed only with algebra, biology and a basic knowledge of English literature.



Guys, no.
(Photo by Getty Images)

"One of the most important ways to prepare [students] for a successful life ahead is to make sure that they understand how money works and how that system works," said state Sen. Steve Wilson, a Republican and the bill's lead sponsor.

[The bill](#), approved last week by the House on a 66-26 vote, would amend the state standards for financial literacy instruction to include 10 "free market capitalism concepts," ranging from the factual ("private ownership of capital may

take many forms, including via a family business, a publicly traded corporation, or a bank, among others”) to the subjective-at-best (“individuals control their own ability to work and earn wages”). Teachers would be required to teach all 10 concepts but could decide on their own how much time to devote to each one.

Critics of the bill — mostly Democrats — questioned the logic of adding new topics to an already complicated curriculum, particularly when most of the proposed concepts are already covered in other classes. Others objected to a provision allowing students to substitute the financial literacy course for a math credit, particularly amid a boom in the [state’s technology sector](#).

“In Ohio, let’s teach students less math as we move into the advanced tech economy with Intel coming in,” said state Rep. Joe Miller, a Democrat and a former teacher.

Course materials

- [Senate bill would remove Alabama state treasurer from higher education loan program](#)
- [Local education administrators and state officials at odds over how to fund Alaska’s schools](#)
- [California students panic after new financial aid application blocks them: ‘I don’t know who to call’](#)
- [‘A perfect mess’: Vermont school construction needs may fall by the wayside in a chaotic budget year](#)



Also Trending

New Mexico lawmakers confirmed Sunday they had removed a treated wastewater market plan from a long-term funding package, throwing the \$500 million project back to the legislature days before adjournment. The proposal, backed by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, will be submitted as a standalone bill, a spokeswoman [told Source New Mexico](#).



*Can a map be a bill?
(Photo via Source New Mexico)*

She did not comment on its prospects. But they seem ... not great. Nothing had been introduced by the time the Senate adjourned on Sunday. It's not clear where it might pop up (in the House, or in the Senate?) or who will sponsor it. The details are scarce because they don't yet exist. The governor's office expected the bill to be funded as part of [the capital outlay package](#), so it had not prepared for this possibility.

"You should expect me to push harder on some of that," Lujan Grisham said Friday at a press conference. "The strategic water supply is a really important first step to making sure that we're creating revenue that we can then apply to protecting our drinking water and freshwater."

The so-called Strategic Water Supply plan aims to leverage produced water, a byproduct of fracking. In New Mexico, [every barrel](#) of oil generates four barrels of produced water, filled with contaminants like sand, hydrocarbons and dissolved oils. (Last year alone, the state pumped more than [64 billion gallons](#) of produced water.) Usually, the water is injected underground or discharged, but it can be treated for reuse. That's the cornerstone of Lujan Grisham's plan, which would

build a “clean energy economy” by using treated produced water in hydrogen fuel production or solar and wind manufacturing.

If a more detailed plan exists, no one has seen it. A related [50-year water plan](#) is similarly short on specifics, [beyond the need](#) to secure \$500 million in severance tax bonds and an assurance, unsupported by documentation, that the state will have 100,000 acre feet of “new water” by 2028. The lack of transparency has infuriated climate groups and advocates, who slammed the state for initiating the project without proper data or vetting.

“It’s a terrible, very risky investment by the state on unproven technology, and nobody’s asking for the science,” said Melissa Troutman, a climate and energy advocate for WildEarth Guardians. “Half a billion dollars is a lot of money to spend on something that’s not proven yet.”

Lawmakers had similar concerns. The project was pulled from the capital outlay package in part because of lingering questions that might be better answered via the traditional legislative process, said state Sen. George Muñoz, a Democrat and chair of the Senate Finance Committee.

“It’s in flux,” he said.

A polite no

- [Federal money could supercharge state efforts to preserve nuclear power](#)
- [Gas meters underwater: What increased flooding means for New Hampshire energy infrastructure](#)
- [A reservoir in southern Utah seeks state funds. Critics say it was proposed under false pretenses](#)
- [In Virginia, new debates over who gets the final say on solar projects](#)



From The Newsrooms

Workforce

- [Indiana has a problem: a lack of nurses. And lawmakers are trying to help.](#)
- [Kansas audit identifies weaknesses in state’s retirement plan for public employees](#)

- [House panel backs work-search requirements for jobless lowans](#)
- [Temp worker advocates say New Hampshire staffing agencies are flouting new law](#)

Gov & Politics

- [Trump's pick for RNC chief worked with top election denier's group](#)
- [Gambling interests put big money on Kentucky governor's race via party governors associations](#)
- [Michigan House speaker strips lawmaker of staff, funds and committee post over 'racist rhetoric'](#)
- [\(Missouri\) 'I'm absolutely being punished': Dean Plocher accused of retaliating against GOP critics](#)

Health care

- [Lawsuit seeks to overturn abortion regulations including Michigan's 24-hour waiting period](#)
- [Missouri lawmakers debate blocking University of Kansas deal with Liberty hospital](#)
- [House committee advances measure that would provide free cancer screenings for Oklahoma firefighters](#)
- [Head of Wisconsin health department aims to bolster the state's health workforce, restore trust in public health](#)



One Last Thing

Gen Xers and millennials [united in their love](#) of Usher after the [Super Bowl halftime show](#), leaving boomers and zoomers to their own (presumably Usher-less) thoughts.

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