

News From The States

EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

Do you have questions about elections, what even is impeachment, fixing the border by refusing to fix the border, and/or the link between stress and life expectancy? Send them to askkate@statesnewsroom.com and I may answer them in an upcoming newsletter!

I had planned to write a happy little introduction about the history of Valentine's Day, which fell apart the moment I started my research. It turns out that the origins of the holiday are [a bit of mystery](#), but it's almost certainly named for one of three martyred saints named Valentine. One was beheaded. Another was murdered for helping Christians escape torture. The third was sentenced to death for marrying young couples in defiance of Emperor Claudius II. At some point, this morphed into a day of roses and chocolate, either because the Catholic church wanted to supersede a pagan ritual or because birds began mating in February.

This was a long and meandering journey that left me mostly bewildered, which somehow fits nicely for the general vibe of this newsletter. Broadly, I would describe that vibe as, "Wait, they did what now?" Love it. Love you.



The Big Takeaway

U.S. House Republicans on Tuesday impeached Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas by [a single vote](#), obliterating yet another political precedent in service of partisan posturing that solves nothing and helps no one other than Donald Trump. Three Republicans joined Democrats in opposing the measure, which marks the first-ever impeachment of a sitting cabinet secretary, [our D.C. bureau reported](#).



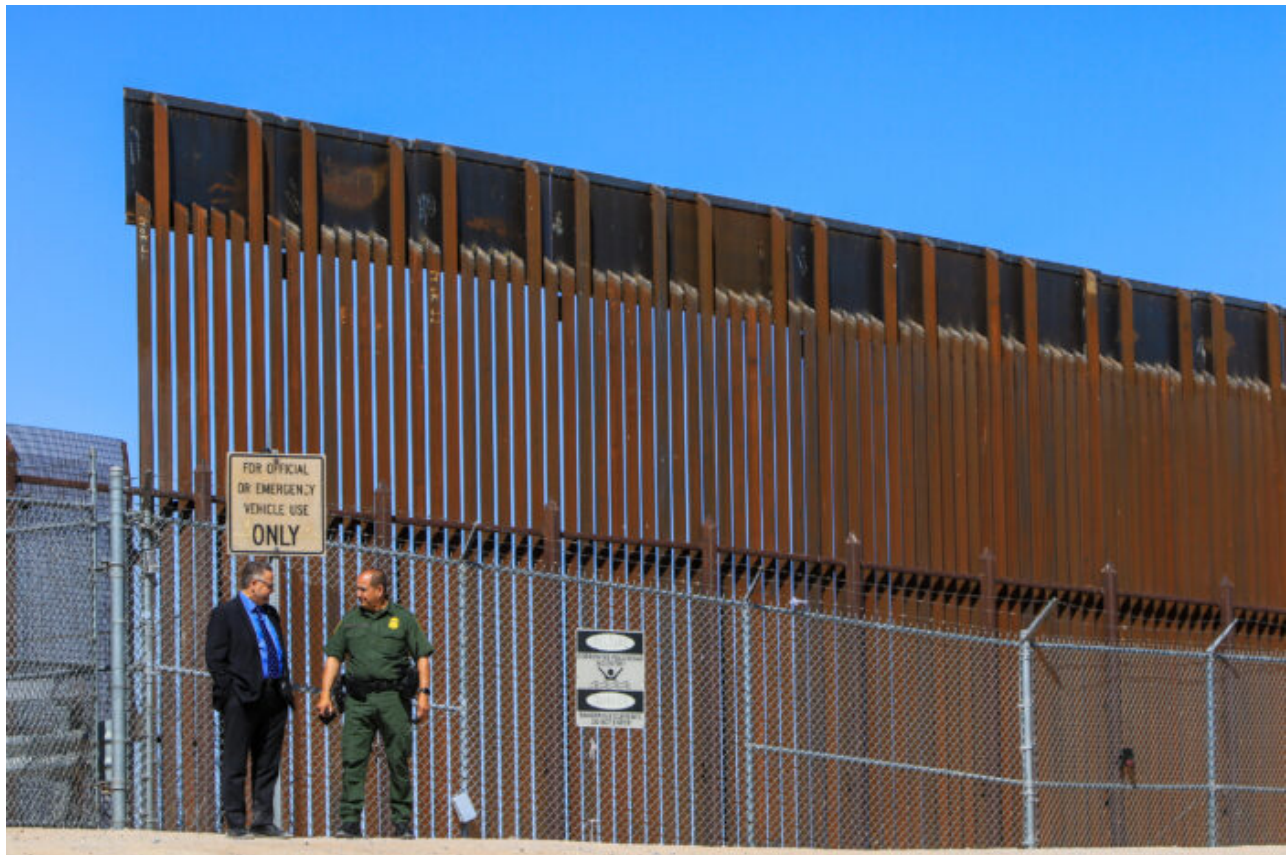
Today I learned that DHS oversees security for the Super Bowl, which would have been a fun thing to write about but, sure, let's do impeachment instead.

(Photo by Candice Ward/Getty Images)

Lawmakers voted 214-213 to approve [two articles of impeachment](#) accusing Mayorkas of “willful and systemic refusal” to enforce immigration law and obstructing a congressional investigation into border security measures. The resolution has little chance of succeeding [in the Senate](#), where lawmakers [have expressed doubt](#) that either claim meets the definition of [“high crimes and misdemeanors”](#) as required for conviction and removal from office. House Republicans likely do not care. Removing Mayorkas was never the point.

The goal of the proceedings was simply to undertake them — to wield the serious process of impeachment as a partisan cudgel to call attention to the subject of immigration, a key issue for [swing state voters](#) and one of a handful of

policy areas where Republicans hold [a polling advantage](#) over Democrats. GOP lawmakers had been highlighting the issue for months, blaming the Biden administration for [record-high border crossings](#) and demanding new security measures in exchange for supporting a foreign aid package. A group of lawmakers spent months hammering out a bipartisan bill to address those concerns, but [Republicans tanked it](#) after Trump [made it clear](#) he planned to campaign heavily on the border crisis. Some members of Congress took note, [soliciting donations](#) for their role in the impeachment process. A spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security called it what it was: “Trampling on the Constitution for political gain rather than working to solve the serious challenges at our border.”



*Here is a border wall, which was not funded by Mexico and is not keeping anyone out of the country.
(Photo by Corrie Boudreaux for Source New Mexico)*

The mere fact of the impeachment [could be enough](#) to hamper Biden’s reelection chances, depending on the life of this particular news cycle. (At some point, we’ve got to get back to our regularly scheduled programming about the fact that he’s [getting older every minute](#).) But the far graver threat is the blatant weaponization of a constitutional power designed solely to hold corrupt officials to account. The destruction of yet another democratic guardrail sets a dangerous

precedent, according to Rep. Mike Gallagher, a Wisconsin Republican who voted against [both impeachment attempts](#).

“Creating a new, lower standard for impeachment, one without any clear limiting principle, wouldn’t secure the border or hold President Biden accountable,” he wrote in [a Wall Street Journal op-ed](#). “It would only further pry open the Pandora’s box of perpetual impeachment.”

Sometimes, just to aggravate myself, I like to ponder what sort of useful things Congress could do if it were run by people with an actual interest in governing. Lawmakers might, for example, spend some time talking about threats to election workers, which haven’t stopped since 2020 and are likely to get far worse ahead of this year’s presidential contest. Federal law enforcement and cybersecurity officials have warned state election administrators to prepare for potential cyberattacks, widespread dis- and misinformation campaigns, and threats to their personal safety, [Stateline reported](#).

“The threat environment, unfortunately, is very high,” said Tim Langan, executive assistant director for the Criminal, Cyber, Response, and Services Branch of the FBI, speaking last week at the winter conference of the National Association of Secretaries of State in Washington. “It is extremely alarming.”



An election worker printing a ballot for a voter (not conducting super secret conspiracy warfare, or whatever).
(Photo by George Frey/Getty Images)

Experts advised election administrators to take a number of precautions, from investing in gloves, masks and opioid-reversing drugs to establishing relationships with local FBI field offices. Updated cybersecurity resources are available via [#Protect2024](#), a new website from the [Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency](#), which warned officials that international criminal groups and foreign adversaries have made “extraordinary” advances in finding ways to break into systems, steal data and disrupt elections. Every jurisdiction is at risk, from large cities to rural townships, said Eric Goldstein, the agency’s executive assistant director for cybersecurity.

“Every single location is at risk regardless of size, regardless of sector,” he said.

Republicans in Utah took aim Tuesday at their own source of election confusion: A ranked choice voting pilot project they said had snarled local election processes in three cities. A [proposed bill](#), advanced 7-4 by a House committee, would end the madness by curtailing the eight-year project in May, seven months ahead of schedule, [the Utah News Dispatch reported](#).

You could, *perhaps*, argue that some of those election problems — such as four city council members-turned-mayoral-candidates [refusing to certify](#) the results of their own race, or questions over how to finalize results after a candidate dropped out as ballots were [being counted](#) — were not strictly about ranked choice voting *per se*. But you *can’t* argue that they *didn’t* all use ranked choice voting, and that is good enough for state Rep. Katy Hall, a Republican and the bill’s main sponsor.

“For me and for my constituents, this is about voter confidence,” she said.



"I ranked DE- as my first choice, MOC- as my second choice and -RACY as my third choice, which is, honestly, kind of confusing."

(Photo by Getty Images)

The pilot was approved by lawmakers [in 2018](#) in hopes of reducing partisan rancor, bolstering confidence in elections and reducing the cost of the primary process — all “noble things,” Hall acknowledged.

“However, it doesn’t appear to have this intended effect,” she added. The system has been complicated for county clerks to implement, difficult for voters to understand, and in some cases more expensive than traditional primaries, she said. Over time, fewer cities have opted in to the pilot, she added.

County officials have stayed neutral on the bill, though at least one said the pilot was to blame for a 10% drop in local voter turnout.

“Just anecdotally, my chief deputy said that his parents, when they got the ballot and saw it was ranked choice voting, they threw it in the trash,” said Utah County Clerk Aaron Davidson. “They just didn’t like it, they didn’t understand it, and so they just didn’t vote.”

Just didn’t like it

- [Alabama Senate approves harsher penalties for some absentee ballot assistance](#)
- [No excuse absentee voting in Georgia survives a state election board vote to end it](#)
- [Idaho GOP won't allow news media inside upcoming Republican presidential caucus](#)
- [Maryland political power couples: Forget Taylor and Travis, we've got...](#)



LGBTQ+ Rights

Arizona Republicans on Tuesday advanced a pair of anti-trans bills that will never make it past Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs, the latest move in a two-year battle that does nothing but make trans kids feel bad and force the state to spend extra money on veto pens, [the Arizona Mirror reported](#).



*Also, stock photos.
(Photo by Getty Images)*

[One bill](#) , advanced 5-2 with the support of one Democrat who should probably reevaluate her choices, would require hospitals, insurance companies and

doctors that provide and pay for detransitioning services if they also offer gender-affirming care. This is a common maneuver from anti-trans Republicans, who aim to demonstrate the “risks” of “pressuring” kids to undergo gender-affirming care. Detransitioning — or undergoing (or ceasing) treatment to revert back to your original gender identity — is real, [but it's rare](#), and most people do it because of external pressure, only to begin transitioning again later. Because it affirms a person's gender identity, detransitioning is also gender-affirming care, so doctors who offer one probably already offer the other, rendering the bill meaningless beyond offering anti-trans activists a chance to rant into a microphone.

Enter Chloe Cole. Cole, a 19-year-old California native, began transitioning at age 12 and received a double mastectomy at 15 before detransitioning at 17. I know this because she travels the country [to talk about it](#) at legislative hearings for anti-trans bills, which is fine and her right but also a real-life example of the rarity of detransitioning. Her comments are typically rife with misinformation, including a claim that “an exponential growth amongst those entering the transition pipeline will inevitably be reflected in those who desist and detransition,” which ignores a number of things, from [refined data collection strategies to increased social acceptance](#).

The [second bill](#) , approved 4-3 on a party-line vote, would amend state law to strike any mention of gender and replace it with a strict and inflexible definition of biological sex. Those standards would then be applied to sports teams, locker rooms, bathrooms, domestic violence centers, and sexual assault crisis centers, which is supposed to “protect women” but really just codifies discrimination against anyone who does not identify as cisgender.

Supporters of the bill claimed otherwise, saying the proposal just *clarifies* the “terms of engagement” for lawmakers considering the role of trans women in public life, a thing that basically just consists of ... existing? In public? And does not really require any “consideration” at all? Oh, and it also keeps “ideology” out of the courtroom, because yeah, we definitely wouldn't want “ideology” infringing on legal decisions, for example, *laws*.

“A powerful group of activists today seek to convince judges and unelected bureaucrats that men who identify as women have an unfettered right to access women's spaces, no questions asked,” said Jennifer Braceras, founder of the deceptively named Independent Women's Law Center.. “The Women's Bill of

Rights is a tool to stop this sort of interpretive overreach and judicial activism.”

The bills are terrible, just like the bills that came before them, because the terribleness is the point. They’ll never become law, but they’ve already served their purpose: Forcing yet another public debate over things that don’t require debate.

Enough already

- [Senate committee approves bill that would remove Alabama Archives’ governing board](#)
- [Georgia Senate panel OKs latest version of “Don’t Say Gay” restrictions](#)
- [‘Heartbreaking’ findings in survey of Nevada LGBTQ+ students](#)



From The Newsrooms

Criminal Justice

- [Michigan State University remembers mass shooting last year](#)
- [Minnesota made prison phone calls free but telecom price-gouging continues](#)
- [Ohio indictments provide a better picture of squalid relationships that spurred massive scandal](#)
- [Washington adults serving extra prison time for juvenile offenses may see sentences reduced](#)

Health care

- [‘Magic mushrooms,’ or psilocybin, research gets OK from Indiana House committee](#)
- [Blue Cross Louisiana backs away from \\$2.5 billion Elevance deal](#)
- [Records show rising call center wait times for Missouri Medicaid, food assistance](#)
- [How are GOP candidates campaigning on abortion in a post-Issue 1 Ohio?](#)

Education

- [Arizona Republican takes aim at public universities he calls ‘anti-American indoctrination camps’](#)
- [Florida may copy a Texas law bringing chaplains to public schools, despite First Amendment concerns](#)
- [On party lines, Kentucky Senate OKs bill to curb diversity, equity, inclusion in higher education](#)
- [Teacher pay mandates pass South Dakota committee without promise of new funding](#)



One Last Thing

This is the end times: They’re [rebooting “Road House.”](#)

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